

THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT SIR WILLIAM HUNT'S.

MATTERS of more kinds than one were making havoc of the mind of Godfrey Mayne, puzzling him nearly out of his reason. What could it have been that so terrified Mary Dixon in the parlour at the Abbey Farm?—and in what lay the mystery connected with Sir William Hunt?

Strolling about the garden in meditative soliloquy the day after Mary's fright had occurred, he gave the reins to his thoughts.

Had Mary's nervous fears overcome her, had she even fancied that she saw the ghost of the dead monk—for it is well-known what absurd tricks the nerves are ready to play us at certain times and seasons—she would certainly have rushed from the room, reasoned Godfrey; she would have cried out to himself and Nancy for protection—they were not beyond hearing. Instead of that, she seemed to be herself afraid of being seen; to be hiding herself from somebody's sight. Had she been seized with fright at suddenly seeing Dick Wilding?—who confessed to have looked in at the window. But in that case, as with regard to the monk, she would surely have run out of the room, not have taken refuge under the cover of the side-table. The more Godfrey thought of it, the less could he make of it: and what he also deemed very strange indeed was, that Miss Dixon did not attempt to give any explanation of the source of the alarm when they were walking home together.

The affair touching Sir William Hunt did not puzzle him as much. It was not impossible that Mrs. and Miss Dixon might have been acquainted with Sir William in the past, that from some cause or other they were not now friendly, and that Mrs. Mayne wished to avoid meeting him again. It was also possible—Godfrey mentally confessed it—that his own suspicions had arisen without due

foundation, and that neither mother nor daughter wished to avoid meeting Sir William. The last doubt would be speedily set at rest, for this was the day of the dinner at Goule Park. If the two ladies went to it, it would be a proof that all was right; if they did not go, why, then the burning question would remain—why did they stay away?

Evening approached. In his restless impatience, Godfrey was ready before anybody else, and paced the drawing-room while waiting: one instant laughing at the mystery he had conjured-up; the next, anticipating the meeting with Sir William. In his excitement he forgot completely for the time that it could not make any difference to him, the promised husband of Elspeth Thornhill, whether Miss Dixon were saint or sinner.

At last he heard steps and voices in the hall. Opening the door, he met his father, looking very uneasy and downcast, and Miss Dixon in a magnificent lemon-coloured silk gown; but without gloves, flowers or ornaments.

"Here's a terrible state of things!" cried out Mr. Mayne, piteously. "My wife has a nervous attack, brought on by the thunder this afternoon!"

"Thunder!" exclaimed Godfrey. "There has not been any thunder—except a very little in the distance."

"But that frightened her, it seems; made her think we might have a storm before we got back again! And she says that she should die if a storm overtook us when we were driving at night. So she won't go. When I tried to persuade her, she nearly went into hysterics."

"But that is nonsense," said Godfrey, impatiently, his suspicions in full force. "It must be all fancy; we sha'n't have a storm: she ought to go, father."

"My dear Godfrey," said his father, surprised at his vehement tone, "if I cannot persuade her, nobody else can. Come; we must start: we are late, as it is."

"But, Miss Dixon—she is going!" cried Godfrey. For the girl had turned to go upstairs.

"No, she stays at home also. Her mother will not spare her."

But Godfrey went past him and laid his hand on Miss Dixon's arm, his face and voice resolute. "What does this mean?" said he, in a low, hard tone. "Why do you avoid this? You shall go."

"Godfrey!" reproved his father, in surprise. "You are forgetting yourself. What business is it of yours? You are frightening Mary, too, see. Go upstairs to your mother, my dear. And Godfrey, come along at once; don't stand there looking angry."

Casting at him a dumb, beseeching glance from her sad brown eyes, Mary went upstairs. Godfrey followed his father into the carriage, and sat perfectly deaf to his comments on his amazing conduct. Mr. Mayne was not sorry to find vent for his annoyance at his wife's unreasonable caprice. But the young man's brain was reeling

with wild conjectures and misgivings, and he heard not a word of the lecture.

Mary returned to her mother's dressing-room as the carriage drove away. It was a little room opening from the bed-chamber, used by Mrs. Mayne as a sitting, or working-room, not as a dressing-room, though called so.

"Mary," she faltered, as her daughter entered, "what is to be done? I cannot think what will become of us. Suppose Sir William gets talking about the past this evening?"

"And if he does!" cheerfully replied the girl, who believed it to be her duty above all things to comfort her sorrowing mother. "It will not affect us—it will not afford any clue to the past."

"One can never be sure," moaned Mrs. Mayne. "My whole life is one prolonged torment from fright, since I knew Sir William's place was in this neighbourhood. He would not recognise you, I suppose; but he would me. Good heavens, what is to be done?"

"Well, mamma, you must endeavour to keep out of his sight while they are in the neighbourhood. In a short time he and Lady Hunt leave again, and then all danger will be over."

"For the present; only for the present. Oh, my child, what will become of me? I shall never know peace again."

"You may know it better than I shall," thought Mary, sadly.

"Sir William might recognise your singing; take care of that," said Mrs. Mayne. "He heard it, you know, that day——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Mary, with a shiver. "Mamma, I shall not be likely to sing where he can hear me."

"You must never sing again," cried Mrs. Mayne, almost fiercely in her eagerness. "It was most imprudent to sing to Godfrey. To let him know that you have such a voice."

"I don't see why. He will not talk of it. I dare say I shall not sing to him again. And now, mamma, I shall tell Lydia to bring you some tea, while I go and take off this grand dress. After that I will read to you, and we will spend a pleasant evening together."

In all this there had been an assumption of lightness in the girl, which was perhaps a little overdone. It struck Mrs. Mayne so, and she caught Mary's hand to detain her.

"Mary, what is it? All day long you have put on a carelessness of speech and manner, done, I am sure, to hide some special anxiety and restlessness. Has anything happened that I don't know of? One would say you went in more than ordinary fear."

Very rapidly a flush passed over Mary's face, leaving it paler than before. But she smiled as if she were at ease.

"How observant you are growing, mamma! There's nothing. Truth to say, I had last night a—a very disagreeable dream, and I can't forget it."

"A dream! That we had been tracked at last?"

"Worse than that."

"Worse than that! Why, what could be worse?" added Mrs. Mayne, gazing at her daughter. "Are you jesting with me, Mary?"

"Why, to be sure I am. Who ever attaches importance to a dream?" concluded the girl, laughing, as she made her escape. But she shivered from head to foot as she went along the corridor; or gallery, as it was more often called. It had been the picture-gallery in the time of the late Mr. Mayne, and a few grand old pictures hung there still.

"No need to tell her of it until I am quite sure," sighed Mary; "and oh, there *may* be some mistake in it. Poor mamma!"

When Mr. Mayne and his son reached Goule Park, much dismay was expressed at the non-appearance of the two ladies, especially as they were the most interesting of the guests invited. The dinner was therefore even more dull than these entertainments generally were at Sir William's. The Underwoods were there, but Ernest was utterly downcast under his disappointment at not meeting Miss Dixon. Mr. and Mrs. Thornhill brought only one daughter, Matilda, the eldest. And a sly old gentleman remarked, in a tone which was purposely loud enough for Godfrey to hear, on the wonderful effect a certain lady's absence had upon his spirits. For at this dinner Godfrey Mayne looked quite like a forlorn lover, lost in himself, and speaking to hardly anybody.

When Lady Hunt retired with the ladies, who in this case could only be conventionally looked upon as enhancing the pleasures of the banquet by their grace and beauty, the gentlemen did indeed seem to feel that they were borne down by one burden the less, and the talk grew more animated. The bishop's last freak; the want of a Tory leader; the new organ which had just been presented to Croxham church; all were discussed, with other topics.

"Have you been into our church since the organ was placed there, Hunt?" asked Mr. Mayne.

The baronet shook his head. "I don't much care for music now," he said; "it tries me. But I'll come over some day soon to hear the new organ. Godfrey, here, will play it for me."

"With pleasure, sir," replied Godfrey, who was no mean musician, particularly on the organ.

"I remember," said the oldest gentleman of the party, who always had a remark with this opening to drag into any discussion, "I remember the time when the music in Croxham church was just a big fiddle and a little fiddle."

"I think the congregation used to join in the singing more heartily before the choir became of so much importance. The old men and women don't dare to join their voices to those of that pretentious row of smart lasses and lads near the organ now," said Mr. Thornhill, who was low church and mild.

"And a very good thing too," said the Reverend George Greville Masterton, who was high church and fierce, and Rector of Cheston.

"Such a bawling and squeaking as one may hear even yet in some out-of-the-way places where the congregation, such as it is, still has it all its own way with the singing. I call it a disgrace to divine service."

"I must say I like to hear good singing in church or anywhere else," said Mr. Mayne. "When I am in London, if the opera is open I always go to it. You used to be a great lover of music, Hunt. Do you still attend the opera much when you are in town—or concerts? I remember you and I heard Jenny Lind for the first time together."

"I have never been to any public entertainment since my boy William died," answered Sir William, gravely. "I do not go where I am likely to hear singing."

"But why, Hunt?" asked Mr. Thornhill.

"Well, you may judge how fond of singing I am now, when I tell you that the most beautiful voice I ever heard, not excepting Patti's or Jenny Lind's, was the voice of the woman who tricked and led my boy to his death."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Colonel Underwood, who was partly a stranger to the history. "How was that, Hunt?"

"It was in Rome," said Sir William; "about two years and a half ago, you know—rather more now. A mother and daughter were there—at least, I think they were mother and daughter, but I am not even yet acquainted with all the details. They ——"

"Were they gentlewomen?" interrupted the Colonel.

"Passing for such—adventuresses, most probably, under the rose. They lured my poor son on and on, with their cards and their wiles and their sweet singing. Such a magnificent voice it was! I had never, as it seemed to me, heard one to equal it—and I should know it to-morrow, were I to hear it again. They lured William on, I say, and—and murdered him in the end."

Godfrey, who had listened in silence, rose from table and staggered to the window. A most awful dread had crept in upon him. The air was suddenly hot as a furnace, the walls were falling upon him, his brain was bursting; his face was wet and ghastly as he stared out into the night.

Rome—two years and a half ago—most beautiful voice—their avoidance of Sir William!—what did it all mean?

The gentlemen at table looked round at him. What was amiss? It couldn't be the wine—he had not taken much of it. Oh, only the heated room!

"That young Mayne must be a milksop!" whispered the Rector of Cheston to the neighbour at his elbow.

As the large, closed carriage rolled homewards over the few miles between Goule Park and Croxham Abbey, Mr. Mayne took the opportunity to rally his son upon his newly developed delicacy.

"I think it is rather amusing, Godfrey, after your indignation at

Mrs. Mayne's illness. Was it the thunder that upset your nerves, also?"

"I don't wish to hear any more about it—or to talk of it, father," said Godfrey. "I was not ill; and my going to the window to get a breath of fresh air had nothing to do with either nerves or thunder. You speak as if I had made a scene. The room was simply too hot; and I have not yet sat through enough heavy dinners in stuffy old houses to be suffocated without minding it."

"Well, I don't know how you can call that big dining-room at Goule 'stuffy,'" returned his father, mildly. "It is twice as big as ours at the Abbey. When we have a dinner-party there you don't jump up suddenly as if you had been shot, and stagger to the window and put your head out, without answering for ever so long, when you are asked what is the matter. Old Masterton got quite nervous, and asked me if you were in the habit of fainting away. A pleasant thing for me, to be suspected of having a son who faints!"

"Very!" interjected Godfrey, satirically.

"Of course I was mortified; but I didn't know what to make of you myself. At first I feared you must surely have had too much wine, but I never knew you to take too much before, and I thought it was curious that you should begin at Sir William's. I saw Underwood grimace, absolutely grimace, when he tried the port; and as for the sherry—well, I believe Hunt gets it by advertisement, I do indeed. I know I shall have a bilious attack to-morrow."

"Well, well, father, let it be. I do not suppose I shall give rise to fears again that I am fainting."

And perhaps the assurance appeased Mr. Mayne. He put himself back in his corner, and fell comfortably asleep.

But there was no sleep, or chance of it, for Godfrey. His mind was simply distracted. One minute calling himself all sorts of wicked names for daring to attach any such suspicion, even for an instant, to Mary Dixon and her mother; the next, recounting over and over again all the points mentioned by Sir William. How could he *dare* to imagine such ill of her? Her beautiful face, with its sad brown eyes, as it had appeared to him when she reproached him for his suspicions—which were light compared with this!—rose up to shame him for his doubts. Doubts! Yes, thank heaven they were only doubts. He would speak to her to-morrow—would it were possible that he could speak to-night!—for, come what would of it, these dreadful doubts must be set at rest. Now he said to himself that he had no right whatever to have raised such doubts; but he saw that, looking back upon past events, they had raised themselves up naturally, as a result of those events.

In a degree they had been chased out of his mind by Mary's grace and charm, and also by common sense, but they came back now with a terribly new meaning suggested by Sir William's words. Was it remorse for having encouraged a mere lad to gamble with

cards which she was so anxious to forget? All Godfrey knew of young William Hunt's death was that it had occurred in Rome in—as he thought—a gambling quarrel, and that the people connected with it had escaped; that was all that anybody knew, for Sir William had an unconquerable repugnance to talk of it. He now recalled his step-mother's agitation at the mention of cards: was it possible—but no, he would not think it; that agitation might arise from some totally different cause.

Mary Dixon a gambling-house inmate!—a decoy! It was a sheer impossibility. Godfrey had heard of such women, of course, knew to what class they belonged, and of what type their attractions must be. And the distance, between such fascinations as theirs and those of the sweet girl whose manners had done even more to infatuate him than her innocent and lovely face, was immeasurable. Godfrey Mayne lived a quiet country life and seldom visited town; but when he was there the circle in which his relations lived, and to which he for the time belonged, was socially among the very best, and his taste in all that concerned women was fastidiously correct. He felt that Miss Dixon could no more have acquired the style which distinguished her from the dowdy ladies of the best, and the over-dressed ladies of the second-best society in the neighbourhood, among the riff-raff of Continental card-sharpers, than she could have cultivated her mind and trained her voice as she had done without the most careful instruction and supervision.

He bent down and held his head in his hands, trying in vain to fight his way, amid the mass of contradictions every fresh thought suggested, to some key to the mystery.

The only solution which occurred to him was one which woke in him a fresh torture, a mad impulse of jealousy. Mrs. Mayne had lived abroad since the death of her first husband, doubtless for the sake of training her daughter's voice; the latter had confessed, by a sudden start which he remembered, to having studied in Italy. Might they not have come in contact with needy adventurers who saw a source of almost boundless profit in the young girl's beauty and glorious voice? Two years and a half ago she was only nineteen: he knew her to be passionate, sensitive, impressionable, impulsive. Might not—the thought was fire—might not some good-looking, well-born roué, who deserved to be an outcast from that society whose manners he still retained, have insinuated himself into the friendship of both ladies, into the love of the younger, and—in some way—compromised them through his own bad manners? But, believe aught ill of themselves, he could not. There had been a time when Godfrey had had doubts about her, which some of his researches in Norfolk had seemed to justify; but they had died with the birth of his love. Pure she was, and must be. He would ask her without loss of time what the trouble was that weighed upon her, and he would be content with her answer, whatever it was (short of any fatal com-

promise), and trust to time and the reassurance it would bring to gain her full confidence, and would defend and comfort her. She might find the whole world hard and cruel, but not him. And—if the worst came to the worst; if he found that she could indeed be no fit wife for him, that the past raised up an insuperable barrier, why he would still do his best to protect, and shield her from the frowns of the world—as he would by some poor young relative of his own who might need it.

And Godfrey's heart glowed within him at the thought only of having this girl to love as a sister, and to ward off evil from always. He forgot Elspeth altogether; he forgot his dear old father, quietly dreaming by his side: just then the whole world contained but him and her.

The carriage rolled up to the door of the Abbey. William opened the door and let down the steps. Godfrey got out, and turned to help his father. Hawkins had the hall door open.

"There, go on, go on, Godfrey," said Mr. Mayne, sleepily: "I want to speak to Barth about the horses."

Mary came running down stairs and across the hall to welcome them, and almost ran against Godfrey, who was rushing in like a whirlwind. She had taken off her dinner-dress, and put on a simpler one of pale pink cashmere.

"I hope you have spent a pleasant evening," said she gaily, "and are come back ready to tell us all about it."

"Oh, very pleasant indeed!" answered Godfrey. "No," he added, in a different tone: "it was intensely dull."

"Dull! What was Lady Hunt about to allow it to be dull? Was she *very* much annoyed with poor mamma for not going? I hope not. It was foolish of her to be so fanciful; I told her so: but she is always alarmed at thunder."

"Is she?" mechanically returned Godfrey, deep in various items of thought.

Mr. Mayne was coming in at the moment. Mary passed Godfrey, and took his hand.

"Well, you naughty girl," said Mr. Mayne, not quite sure yet whether he was only sleepy, or just a little cross as well. "And so you can look quite cheerful and happy, when you have been the means of spoiling a whole evening's entertainment for a number of people."

"Oh, don't say that; it is very unkind to me; you don't mean it, I'm quite sure," said she, coaxingly. "You know I did my best to persuade her to go, and it was not my fault that I failed."

"But you ought to have come yourself. Lady Hunt said so."

"No doubt Miss Dixon had good reasons for not wishing to come," said Godfrey, carelessly, from the hat-stand. It was the last thing he ought to have said, if he intended to carry out his programme of storming Miss Dixon's confidence; but the coolness with which she

was asserting this, which he believed was not true, irritated him out of his prudence. The temptation to disturb her deceitful serenity was again strong upon him. But the serenity he disturbed was another person's.

Mr Mayne turned sharply on his son : it was the peculiar tone of voice that annoyed him. "What do you know about it, Godfrey ? Mary's reasons for staying away were good—those of a dutiful daughter. I wish *you* could give as good reasons for your unaccountable conduct this evening."

Mary cast a lightning glance at Godfrey ; but Mr. Mayne was speaking again.

"Your mother, child : how is she now ? Has she got over the thunder—of which we did not hear another sound ?"

"Yes, quite," said Mary. "Come up, and see. She seems a little nervous yet, lest it should come back in the night. I won't say but she is sorry now that she did not go."

"I should think so," rejoined Mr. Mayne, as he followed the girl upstairs.

Mrs. Mayne was still in the dressing-room, seated on the sofa by the fire, which she had caused to be lighted : any sort of nervousness, especially that of a dreaded thunder-storm, made her feel chilly, she informed her maid, Lydia. She greeted her husband with an air of repentant humility which completed his subjection. He rallied her a little on being so sagacious a weather-prophet ; and she replied, with a pretty air of yielding, that she was very very sorry. Mary sat down by her mother. It was scarcely yet the usual hour for retiring—eleven o'clock—for the party had broken up early. Mary asked Mr. Mayne to tell them all about the dinner and the dresses.

"Oh, you must ask Godfrey about the dresses ; I don't remember any of them, except that Mrs. Thornhill wore a brown gown with little black velvet bows. I remember that because I have always met her in that gown at dinner-parties for a long time now."

"How severe you are getting, sir," laughed Mary. "I didn't think you could say anything so cutting as that."

"Cutting—do you call it ?" cried Mr. Mayne. "I didn't mean it to be so. I don't at all see why a lady should not wear a dress until it is worn out, if it is pretty. I don't think this one of Mrs. Thornhill's is pretty, though."

"The dresses of people who wear them till they are worn out never are pretty," said Mary, saucily.

"Nonsense ! Young ladies have no business with such extravagant notions. Matilda was in—in white muslin, I think."

"That was prettier than Mrs. Thornhill's brown silk."

"Well, perhaps so. When I say that Mrs. Thornhill's is not pretty, I only mean that—well, I felt as if I wanted to cut off some of the little bows. And I thought it would look better if it had one of those long flounce things behind, like the one you came down in, Mary."

The girl smiled mischievously. "A train, you mean. Well, yes, I should think it would."

"For my own part, I like something brighter than those dull browns and drabs. I like blue or pink," added Mr. Mayne.

"Did not Mrs. Locksley wear her pink?" asked Mrs. Mayne, with displayed interest.

"Let me see? Yes, I think she was in pink. But that is not quite the colour I mean. I like, well, I like the colour of this one that you have on, Mary."

"It is a pretty shade," said the girl, looking down approvingly. "But, indeed, sir, you would not call my dresses pretty if I wore them till they were as old as Mrs. Thornhill's."

"It seems to me that Mary spends more than half her income upon dress," remarked Mrs. Mayne. "Quite too much."

"Yes; you are an extravagant girl and a saucy one, Miss Mary," assented Mr. Mayne, playfully, "and you will never get a husband. Some handsome, dashing young fellow may think you look like a nice girl; but he will say to himself: 'She spends all her own money on dress, and that is how she would spend mine.'"

"And the dear girl is welcome to do so," he would add," returned the young lady, with renewed sauciness. "And then he would propose to me; and I should know that he cared, not for the little money I have, but for myself, and I should instantly say Yes, and marry him."

Mr. Mayne laughed. "I shall warn Ernest Underwood that he had better look out for someone more economical."

"My dear Henry!" protested his wife, with what looked like a touch of real anxiety.

"Well, I think it is an open secret now; at least among ourselves, Laura," replied the well-meaning, blundering man, good humouredly: not noticing that the girl herself had grown suddenly still and grave. "You should have seen how the young fellow's face fell, Miss Mary, when I and Godfrey appeared without you! Two disconsolate lovers were enough to damp anybody's spirits at a dinner-party, and with Ernest on one side of the table and Godfrey on the other, both looking as gloomy as if they were at a funeral——"

"Godfrey!" interrupted Mrs. Mayne. "What did he look gloomy about?"

"About Elspeth, I suppose. Mr. and Mrs. Thornhill turned up with only Matilda; and—— Why, dear me! I wonder if that had anything to do with——"

"With what?" questioned Mrs. Mayne.

"Well—only that Godfrey, who had better let his hair grow long, and call himself a poet at once, seems about to go in for being interesting. What do you think he did this evening by way of diversion? I admit we were a little dull after the ladies had left us. He sprang up from the table when we were all quietly talking, walked

zigzag fashion to the window, and leant against it as if he were going to faint! I thought he must be ill ——"

"Is he ill?"

"No. He said it was the heat. The heat! in September! And in that big, draughty dining-room of theirs!"

"Was anything said that vexed him?" asked Mary. "There must have been some reason for his looking so."

"Nothing at all was said of that sort," dissented Mr. Mayne, rubbing up his memory. "We had been talking of—of church music; yes, that was it: the singing of our choir. That couldn't make him feel faint—out of church, at any rate. And then Sir William spoke of his son's death, mentioning some particulars that none of us had heard before: but there was nothing in all that to affect Godfrey. He—why, Laura! you are looking faint yourself, now!"

"I am only a little tired," murmured Mrs. Mayne.

"The fact is, mamma ought not to have sat up so long this evening," said Mary, calmly, as she rose: "a storm, or only the threatening of a storm, fatigues her. Mamma, I think you should go to bed. I shall ring for Lydia."

"Well, I never had so many frights and disappointments and surprises in one evening before," cried Mr. Mayne. "First your mother is ill; then Godfrey tries to faint; and I declare you yourself look whiter than either of them. Is there something the matter with all of you—or what is it?" he asked, with a sudden change of tone.

"There is something the matter with me, I know," laughed Mary, who was quite equal to coping with her unsuspicious step-father. "I think if I don't find myself in bed very shortly, I shall drop off to sleep as I stand, and sleep for a hundred years, like the princess in the fairy-tale."

"I don't feel inclined for bed yet," said Mr. Mayne; "I'm not sleepy. I'll go downstairs and have it out with Godfrey about that fainting matter—that is, if he is about yet. Good-night, Mary."

"No, mamma, I will not have you talk to-night," said Mary, as her mother was beginning with an eager whisper the moment the door closed. "There is nothing to alarm you; I am sure of that. You must get a good night, and be fresh and well in the morning."

"But, Mary," remonstrated the unhappy lady, striving to still her trembling hands, "you heard what was said about Godfrey and his agitation: his suspicions must have been further directed to us; to you and to me. *Something* must be done—to allay them."

In low, eager tones the mother talked until the maid entered. Then, with a warm, comforting kiss, and a last soft promise that all should be right, Mary took up a small lighted lamp, and withdrew. The day's work and the day's strain had sadly tired her, and she was full of secret anxiety beyond what her mother knew of. Leaving the lamp on a slab near her own door, she walked on softly down the wide, handsome corridor, intending to open the end

window and stand at it, that the fresh air might cool her throbbing temples.

But the window was already open. The bright moonlight streamed in, lighting up the green-carpeted floor and a few of the paintings that hung here and there upon the walls. And not until Mary was quite close to the window did she perceive that someone was leaning against the frame. It was Godfrey.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE MOONLIT GALLERY.

GODFREY was himself in a mental tumult. Godfrey had throbbing temples also. And Godfrey had gone to the gallery window for the fresh air and the indulgence of thought just as Mary had been going.

He wanted to have his doubts set at rest. Set at rest in some way. His sober reason refused to believe that she, that delicate girl, could have been mixed up in the affair of young William Hunt's death; he felt sure that, if it were so, it must have been innocently and unwittingly. But he must know.

He did not know what he should say to her; all he knew was that he must speak to her as soon as might be, that the force of his passionate entreaties must prevail with her to trust him. He would not tell her he loved her; he could not while he was engaged to Elspeth, he had sense enough to remember that: and, in good truth, he should never tell her, unless his doubts were solved. If she guessed it, why he could not help that; but he would use all the inducements a brother might use, with a thousand times a brother's fervour; and surely she, so sensitive, passionate, impulsive under all the cold armour of reserve she could put on when she chose, would recognise the true ring in his sympathy and let her heart go out to meet it, and trust him fully with the past. Why, if he could meet her in the corridor, even then, on her way to her chamber, he would speak without further delay.

A great deal of this was simple folly. But it was born of a resolution so earnest, so devoted, that it might carry its object by force. To waylay a young lady at night in a moonlit corridor, and force her by the mere power of passionate persuasion to confess to him a secret which she had closely guarded from everyone until that moment, would have seemed, even to Godfrey, a wildly impossible enterprise viewed by the light of reason, or even thought over in broad daylight. But his love, his doubts, Sir William's words, and perhaps the heat of the little wine he had taken, were all casting their glamour over him, and robbing him in a degree of his sober calmness. All he felt was that her secret, whatever it might be, he must share with

her ; she was unhappy, and he must comfort her. On the face of it, this was a delicate task for an engaged man : but for all the cynicism he professed, for all the passion he now began to feel, Godfrey was as pure-hearted as a child, and he trusted quite simply to his own single-minded intentions. And then some day, some day—if that past could be entirely cleared—ah, what a glorious future was possible ! When he should be free, somehow, and she should know that he loved her with all his heart and soul.

And so he stood and thought and dreamt, and the glamour upon him grew brighter ; until he heard her—her—coming down the long corridor, and fell to trembling when she was so close as almost to touch him.

And she ? After the first moment of surprise and fright, for she did not immediately recognise the intruder, her indignation rose against this man. For a thought flashed into her mind that he must have come there to lie in wait for her ; to take her, all unprepared, weary, sick with anxiety as she was, to accuse her, to question her, to frighten her—all the outcome of what he had heard at the dinner-table. Her spirit rose at the very thought of the insolence.

"Good night," she said, turning abruptly, to retreat.

"One moment, please, Miss Dixon," said he, with that thrill in his voice which makes man or woman pause and listen. He had moved a little now, and stood upright, and he gently touched her dress to arrest her. "I want to say a few words to you."

"I am very tired now. Won't to-morrow do, Mr. Godfrey ?"

"No, no ; there is something—just a word—I must say to-night. I see you are tired ; I won't keep you ; but I was very rude this evening, just before we started for Goule Park, and I am glad not to wait until the morning to tell you how much ashamed I feel, and how very, very sorry I am to have caused you any distress—for you looked distressed. You will not refuse to forgive me, I hope."

"Of course I will not refuse. Indeed, I had forgotten all about it. I took it for granted that you must have been vexed about some other matter, so that a little thing irritated you."

She spoke coldly and carelessly. He appeared to be in the kind, gentle mood she had begun to think the most dangerous in him, and to-night there was something in his tone she had not heard before, something which told her there was a meaning, a purpose in all this. He was going to be her enemy, she supposed : well, she must avoid him now, and cope with him another time. But he had decided that it should be now.

"Was it such a very little thing, Miss Dixon ?" he asked.

"We will discuss that some other time," said she, wearily. "I do not feel equal to a late argument to-night in the passage."

"Were you not coming here to get a breath of air, this close night ?"

"Yes, I was," she answered, truthfully ; "for my head aches."

"Stand here and take it, then. And won't you please answer me while you do so?"

She hesitated. Her sense of fatigue was vanishing before a momentarily increasing anxiety to know what it was he had found out or suspected; and she turned in acquiescence.

They stood together at the window, looking out on the fair night scene, Godfrey with his arms folded, his head drawn up, the moonlight playing upon his fair, bright hair. Mary in her pale pink frock looked little more than a girl: a small gold locket was suspended from her neck by a thin chain, and bore her initials, M. D., in diamonds that flashed in the moonlight. She stood with her pale face bent.

"Was it a very small thing which kept you away from Goule Park this evening?" reiterated Godfrey.

"A very small thing, I am afraid, to be the cause of offending so many people, and of bringing this most undeserved penance upon the head of a poor girl who had nothing to do with it," answered she.

"Nothing to do with it?"

"Why, no. How could I have? Surely you don't think of making me responsible for mamma's fancies about the thunderstorm?"

"But I do not understand why the fancies should have come. There was really no appearance of thunder."

"Do you think not?"

"Miss Dixon," said he, playing a bold stroke, "why did you avoid going to Goule Park this evening?"

"Avoid going! You are talking at random," she retorted.

"What reason could I have had for not wishing to go there?"

"I—don't—know. I want to know. I would give my right hand to know."

He was clearly in earnest; in such terrible earnest that it was difficult to stand there beside him and face the searching gaze of his eyes, fixed keenly upon her.

"Then I think you had better ask someone more able to inform you than I am."

She made another movement to turn; but Godfrey spoke again.

"Are you wise in treating me like this, Miss Dixon?"

Her face, as it confronted his, looked rigid as stone. "What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that your secret, the secret you confess to holding and to hiding, is connected with someone you would have met at Goule this evening. Unless I am greatly mistaken."

"Indeed! This is quite the most curious accusation I ever heard. But let us suppose, for a moment, it were true. You have not the least idea what my secret is——"

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Nor does a secret necessarily imply a crime," she

boldly added, sick of the fencing. "And even if it did, are you a detective officer?"

"No. But ——"

"Stay, Mr. Godfrey. Do you not know ——"

She seemed to stop for breath: it was growing short. The moonbeams, broken slightly by the branches of a tree outside, fell on her face. How sweet and sad it looked!

"Do you not know that all women, young or old, may have little secrets, innocent enough generally, which are as sacred to them as the laws of their religion? Can you tell me what reason I could have for making you, against my own will, the high priest of my confidences? My mother has married your father. Does that give you a right to the key of my heart and conscience?"

"I pray you ——"

"I pray you, hear me. Mr. Mayne has never asked for a journal of my inmost thoughts, never even taken the common precaution of sending some astute person about the country to find out whether I am not masquerading under false colours. But you have. Not content with suspecting, watching, tracking, you are beginning to persecute me and to make my very life a burden to me."

She put her hand upon the window-sill, her slight frame shaking. Godfrey did not speak.

"Yes. Now begin your cross-examination, for I must submit to it, I see. It would be absurd for me to try to stop you by calling your conduct mean and cowardly: on a man, who can behave as you are doing, such words can have no effect."

At that moment Godfrey thought he heard a sound behind them; he turned his ear sharply to listen. She, not understanding his silence, tapped her fingers upon the window-sill impatiently.

"Well, are you not going on?" cried she, in a reckless tone. "No criminal has to stand at the Bar all night."

"You are partly making sport of this, Miss Dixon. To me it is anything but sport. I feel half ashamed to question you; and to explain to you what it is that has given rise to—to——Sir William Hunt was telling us a tale this evening," he rapidly went on; "and it took, I hardly know why, a strangely-curious hold upon me."

All her bravado vanished at once. "What tale was it?"

"One which contained an implication so terrible that I—dare not repeat it."

"On me?"

"Heaven help me! I—don't—know."

"Of what kind?"

He answered without daring to look at her. "Treachery. Con-
nivance at—a crime."

"What crime?"

"I *cannot* tell you," he burst forth with emotion. "I feel as if I were going mad?"

"I think you are; but never mind that at present. I should really like to know what crime it is I have connived at, or been supposed to connive at. Is it theft?" A pause. "Forgery?" A pause. "Murder?"

Godfrey shuddered. He could feel by the tremulous motion of her dress that she was shaking from head to foot. But when she spoke, her voice was low and still.

"So that was the crime Sir William regaled his company with! Murder!—and a very terrible crime too. Pray whose?"

"His son's; young William."

"Oh, his son's! Where did I do it?"

Godfrey seized her cold hand in his, and looked at her with a face as white as her own. "If you have any mercy, do not treat it in that way! Every mocking word you speak cuts me like a knife."

"I am sorry I cannot speak on this subject more pleasantly. I ——"

At last she was giving way under the strain, staggered, and partly fell against him. He put his arm round her, and for one brief instant her cheek rested nervelessly on his shoulder. The next moment she was standing up again and had put his arm away.

"I am not ill, thank you; I am too hardened for that. At least I ought to be, if what you would accuse me of is true ——"

"Mary, for Heaven's sake, stop! Do you think I am flint? Do you care? Don't you see you are torturing me like ——"

"Am I? And I meant to be so nice about it! I beg your pardon for seeming so ungrateful. I really don't know how to apologise for having had the bad taste to be annoyed ——"

"Silence," he interrupted, sternly. "Do you suppose I for a moment thought you really guilty? Why, if I had, could I have *spoken* to you about it? Trusting in you as I do ——"

"Yes: you have shown that trust before, very touchingly."

"Look here: there can be no doubt that your mother showed singular emotion when she heard the name of Sir William Hunt, and that his place was in this neighbourhood; she remained at home this evening on an absurdly slight pretext, and insisted on your remaining with her—for which there was no shadow of excuse. It set me thinking: and when Sir William spoke of—of—the death of his son, and that two ladies were in some way involved in it, mother and daughter, one of them young and beautiful—well, I suppose I must have thought of your mother and you, and I suppose I must have gone a little out of my mind to do so. There's the whole truth, and I can only beg of you to forgive me."

"What else did Sir William say of the one that was young and beautiful?"

"Nothing," carelessly replied Godfrey: for, strange to say, the remark that had made more impression on him than aught else—the magnificent voice Sir William had heard—he repressed.

"With my will, or against my will, I kept fitting things together in my mind," he returned, "until I was tortured just to death. Then I said to myself, I am very foolish, I know, but I will tell it all to Mary Dixon, and that will ease me. What else could I have done?"

"What else?" retorted she, passionately: "Call in a policeman and give me into custody. Say to him that you have heard of a murder committed by a good-looking girl in Rome—it was Rome, I think you said?—and that you consider me good-looking; that you are sure I have been to Rome, and that you will fit the crime to the girl or the girl to the crime in no time. Don't interrupt me. Believe me, I understand your feelings perfectly. Why, I had fancied I might be doing something rather rash in staying here tête-à-tête with you when it's going on for midnight; but now it is your courage in facing me, with no arms of defence about you, that I cannot sufficiently admire. Why do you encounter so frightful a risk? How do you know but I may have a dagger concealed in my pocket?"

He could not tell whether she was cold, or at a white heat of excitement: she was trembling. Her fair features were white and rigid as marble; in her rich brown eyes, gazing at him through their long dark lashes, there lay an angry yet most pitiful light.

"You are doing me cruel injustice, Miss Dixon," he said at last, very quietly. "I cannot force your confidence, I cannot make you believe I deserve it. I am sorry to have forced upon you this painful interview; it was a mad thing to do, and I don't know how to undo it. I will not detain you any longer. Perhaps later I may think of some form of apology to you; I cannot now." Godfrey passed his hand over his forehead, as if unable to collect his thoughts. Then he said, still in the same subdued voice, "My presence, after this scene to-night, could not fail to be distasteful to you; but you have nothing to fear from that; I shall quit the Abbey."

It was a sudden resolution; taken on the spur of the moment: but he felt that to remain at home would be unbearable after this. Again there came the sound that he thought he had before heard, and he turned his head. Mary stood in thought.

"Mr. Godfrey, it is my turn to beg now. I know—I feel that when you leave me I shall be ashamed and sorry for all the hard and harsh things I have just now spoken. I have been very rude, I am afraid; I hardly know what I said—I was so miserable, so much hurt—" Her voice trembled, and she paused. "But I know I must have been unpardonably harsh for you to speak of my chasing you from your home.—What is it that you are looking at?" she broke off to question; for Godfrey still had his head turned.

"I fancied I heard a faint noise, as of someone being there."

She turned her face—startled. "In the gallery—behind us?"

"No, in the old school-room. I dare say I was mistaken."

"And you will not let me chase you away from the Abbey?" she said, as they turned to the open window again.

"It is not that: not anything you have said: you did well to be indignant. But you will forgive me if I go away. At the end of two or three months, when I come back, you will have forgotten it, perhaps."

"Do you think one forgets such an accusation as that?" She spoke so gently, so sadly now, with no passion, no hardness. "I can never forget it; I think you will understand that when you recall what a dreadful charge it is that you would bring against me."

"No, no, I brought no charge. I will tell you what I thought; I know how devoted you can be, by your fondness for your mother: I thought it was just possible that someone in whom you and your mother were interested, some relative, or—or a lover——"

"I have never loved anyone," she quietly interrupted: and in her face there shone a look of noble steadfastness that made Godfrey's heart leap. "Never. Do you believe me?"

"I *do* believe you," he said. "Now will you answer one question: why do you avoid Sir William Hunt?"

There was an instant's pause. "I do not avoid Sir William Hunt."

"Surely you cannot say that?"

"I do say it."

Godfrey leant against the window-frame, wholly taken by surprise, sick with disgust and bitter disappointment. Through all his doubts, he had not expected a bold, deliberate falsehood from her.

"After that, of course I have no more to say, Miss Dixon."

"But I have," she answered. "You have asked for a confession, for my confidence; you shall have them both. Then you will see why I have kept them back for so long. There is a secret that concerns Sir William Hunt; but it is not mine. It is my mother's."

"Mrs. Mayne's!" exclaimed Godfrey.

"Yes. And I cannot compliment you on your penetration in not having discovered as far as that for yourself. Who was it that turned faint at the first mention of Sir William's name? Who was it that wanted to refuse the invitation to Goule Park altogether?—for I know that did not escape you. Who was it that was taken with nervousness to-night in time to avoid going to the dinner?"

Godfrey could not help wondering, as she put these questions slowly and forcibly, why this view of the matter had never struck him before. But Mrs. Mayne had seemed so very impossible a person to have a secret of her own—at least one of any importance.

"Try to think over all the times when Sir William or Goule Park has been mentioned, and to remember who it was that showed the most emotion," she continued.

"Mrs. Mayne, certainly. But she shows her feelings more readily than you do."

"She had more reason in this case. You shall judge for yourself.

A long time ago she knew Sir William, and a matter arose between them in which she treated him, as he thought, very ill. I know the circumstances, and I do think he had reason to feel aggrieved and hurt; though not to the extent he did, or to vow he would sometime be revenged upon her. But they say he is a man who treasures up his wrongs, and even now she is afraid to meet him, whether rightly or not, I cannot say. It is possible that he might attempt to make mischief between her and Mr. Mayne. She never cared a straw for Sir William; while the other man, for whom she—she—threw him over, she would have given her life for."

"Is this true?" asked Godfrey, impulsively.

"Every word of it is true."

Godfrey bent his head in an agony of relief and thankfulness. When he looked up, he met the gaze of her speaking eyes fastened upon him with an eager intentness that startled him. It meant something he could not understand. As he met her look her eyes fell.

"You will not suspect me again?"

"I will not. I will keep your confidence, and your mother's secret, with my life," said he, fervently.

"You must keep it. And you can do so with a clear conscience; for she, poor kindly mother, has never done aught worse than tell a few harmless stories and practise a few simple manoeuvres—which were always found out—in all her life."

This was exactly the character Godfrey would himself have given his step-mother. In his relief he laughed.

"Thank Heaven the secret was not yours!" he breathed in a low voice. "You—you can understand perhaps how glad I am?"

"Yes, of course," said she, quietly. "And now I will wish you good-night, Mr. Godfrey."

He clasped nervously the hand she held out to him, and turned to walk up the gallery with her. "You will forgive me my doubts, suspicions, questions, everything? If not, I——"

"I forgive everything on one condition," she interrupted: "that you will not think of quitting the Abbey until I shall have left it."

"But you will not leave it. Surely you will not. You have just said you would forgive me."

He spoke with more fervour than the occasion required, and Miss Dixon withdrew her hand.

"I am not going on your account, I assure you, Mr. Godfrey. For some little time past I have been thinking that I ought to go. However, we will leave that at present."

They were nearing the slab where she had placed the little lamp, which did not give much light. The first door was that of the old school-room; beyond it that of Mary's bed-room. On the opposite side a door opened into a guest-chamber, which was not occupied. Godfrey suddenly stopped, looked at her, and bent his head, in the act of listening. Putting his finger on his lips to enjoin silence, he laid

his hand softly upon the door-handle of the school-room : a sound, as of a suppressed cough was heard within it. For an instant she looked convulsed with terror ; then, with astonishing want of presence of mind, called out aloud :

"What is it? Someone is in there!"

"The lamp—quick!" cried he.

But in her fright she let it fall just as he was snatching it from her ; or it may be they let it fall between them. There was enough moon-light to enable him to see a match-box standing on the slab. He seized it and dashed open the room door. The blinds were not drawn down ; he was able to satisfy himself without any artificial light that no one was in the room, and he concluded the sounds must have come from the corridor. He looked down it, but could see no one. Miss Dixon was examining her little lamp.

"The matches, please ; I want to light this," said she, holding it up to see whether it was injured by the fall. Her teeth were chattering with fear ; she tried to suppress it. "Could anybody get into the house?" she whispered.

"No, no ; of course not. It must have been one of the servants. I believe it was Lydia."

"Lydia is with mamma."

"It was one of them, I know ; eavesdropping," persisted Godfrey.

"Well, yes, I think it was. Perhaps it was Hawkins?"

Godfrey believed that, if so, the faithful Hawkins must have been visiting the decanters, and mistaken his way to bed. Of which he would hear more from Godfrey in the morning.

Mary Dixon shook hands with Godfrey, and shut herself into her room. He went back with slow steps to close the gallery window, and stood there thinking.

He was in a tumult of feeling. Elspeth was utterly forgotten. What thought could he give to *her*, that simple little maiden, amid the storm of fierce emotions which this pale girl with the changeful dark and lovely eyes had awoke in him this night? He had hated her, admired her, feared her, worshipped her, mistrusted her by turns, to find himself, now that he was left alone, ten times more surely the slave of her influence than if she had hung about him with soft words and caresses, and an answering love-light in her passionate eyes.

Passionate : but yet, how cold she was ! For this delicate girl had a strange dignity, and could hold her own against the world. She owned that she had never felt love ; that did not mean that she never could feel it. No man thinks a cold woman can be cold to him, if only he should deem it worth his while to induce her to be the contrary. There was a certain coldness about Mary Dixon which Godfrey did not at present intend to seek to subdue ; but wild possibilities of hope, fear, longing, despair chased each other about in his excited brain.

Closing the window, he began slowly to pace the corridor back, on

his way to his own room : when, as he was passing Mary Dixon's, sounds again smote his ear. Sounds of distress this time : wild sobs, moans of anguish, if not of terror.

When Mary entered her room, all the impassive calmness she had been endeavouring to keep up was thrown to the winds. She glanced nervously about her, as if fearing to see an enemy ; then, sinking down on the ground like one in the depth of despair, throwing her hands upon a chair and her head upon them, she gave way to the most bitter distress. Convulsive sobs shook her frame, and they became loud and louder, almost beyond control.

She was disturbed by a hurried knocking at the door. She started up, dried her eyes as well as she could, and opened the door a little way. "Is it you, Lydia? Does mamma want me?"

"It is I—Godfrey."

Her tear-stained cheeks, which there was just light enough to see, moved him as her most radiant smiles had never done ; he almost lost command over his words. He thought it was he who had caused the distress.

"Forgive me ! I heard you crying. It is my fault, I know—some of the hateful things I said. If I did but know how to comfort you ! I care for you more than for anyone on earth. I love you—I grieve for you—my heart is torn with ——"

"Sir !" interrupted Miss Dixon, with the air of an empress. "How dare you address such words to me?" she added, her voice alive with passion. "How dare you come knocking at my door at this hour? Love ! Are you mad?"

Godfrey drew himself up to his full height. "I beg your pardon if I have offended you," he said in a cold, proud tone. "But you mistake me. Did you ever have a sister, Miss Dixon? I believe not. Well, I have one : my dear little sister Isabel. This was her room ; and sometimes I have heard sobs of distress from her in her girlish troubles just as I now heard them from you ; and I have come to the door here to comfort her—to see what I could do for her. I had no other thought now. And for that I humbly crave your pardon. I am not quite mad. Good-night."

He went quickly along the gallery towards his own room. Mary Dixon gazed after him until he was out of view, a strangely softened expression on her face and a piteous look in her tear-dimmed eyes, as if it was hard to be so cruel to this well-meaning young man, who wanted to be so kind to her.

"I cannot help myself ; I cannot help myself !" she murmured, plaintively, a fresh flood of tears streaming forth. "Oh, merciful God, Thou knowest all my miserable plight ; all my helplessness !"

CHAPTER XV.

LOCKED IN THE VESTRY.

GODFREY MAYNE woke next morning to quite the most miserable and uncomfortable state of mind he had ever been in. He had not slept until morning light. An impression lay upon him that he had made a fool of himself in more ways than one the previous evening. He wished Miss Dixon at the bottom of the sea.

It was late when he got downstairs. Mr. Mayne was leaving the breakfast-room; Mary Dixon had left the table and was standing at the window, both of them having finished their meal.

Godfrey said Good-morning, and advanced to the breakfast-table. In spite of the sore feeling underlying his mind against Miss Dixon, he thought she might as well come back and offer to pour out his coffee. She did nothing of the kind. So Godfrey, rather cross and snappish, seized the coffee-pot to pour it out for himself; in doing which he caught the handle of the urn with his cuff and turned some boiling water over on his hand.

"Hang it!" he exclaimed under his breath, as he stamped and shook his fingers. And just then he caught sight of Miss Dixon, who stood watching him with a suspiciously demure expression of face. What business had she to stand there laughing at him instead of coming forward to his assistance? But she did come.

"May I do that?" she asked, gravely; and poured out his coffee. In the meantime he had been foraging about the table and found nothing to his liking, hammered away at two eggs with the comment "Brickbats!" smashed down the cover on the kidneys with the word "Cold," and at last went to the side-board and began cutting away at the cold beef with an appearance of much labour.

"Had you not better use the edge of the knife?" suggested Mary, and burst into a fit of open laughter.

"Oh, ah, yes," said he, trying to laugh also, as he saw that he was cutting with the back of the knife, but much vexed with himself, and still more so with her. However, she tried to make amends for the offence by ringing for more eggs, handing him a fork, and being oversolicitous about the sweetness of his coffee. Godfrey began to feel soothed; and to come round a little.

"You must think me very ill-tempered."

"Oh no, not at all," she answered, with apparent astonishment at the suggestion.

He was conquered, and began to laugh. "I am so," he said. "The truth is, I have had a very bad night. I couldn't get to sleep, and—and that has put me out of temper, I suppose."

"Ah, yes, it often does. I mean," she corrected, "it is the sort of thing that makes one feel rather—rather irritable next day."

"Yes. There was a wicked gnat buzzing about my room, for one thing," said he, uncomfortably.

"Gnats are very troublesome."

Then came a pause. Godfrey, who had no appetite, was laying down his knife and fork. "Is Mrs. Mayne not down yet?" he asked.

"Not yet. Mamma has had some breakfast taken up to her."

Another pause. Godfrey wanted to come easily and neatly to the subject of that unlucky intrusion of his, and to put the matter right, once and for ever. He supposed she might still be thinking hard things of him for it, perhaps to the extent of believing him to be no gentleman. So he wished to come to an explanation; a thing which men, in their right mind, usually avoid: especially, perhaps, if they know they are not in the wrong. At all events the conversation must be kept up somehow. He went back to the gnat. But he did not find that help him much.

Presently she got up and walked to the window. Godfrey followed. "I wanted to tell you how sorry I am for—for last night," he said. "You must have thought me very—very unconventional, and—and I haven't the least idea what I said; but, if it was anything rude or— or foolish, I hope you will forget it. One says very foolish things sometimes."

"One does often."

"Very foolish. At least not exactly foolish, perhaps, but——"

"But untrue. Don't trouble yourself any more about the matter, Mr. Godfrey. There were gnats in my room, too, and—and let them bear the blame of everything."

"Oh, yes, exactly; of everything. Only—I can't bear to think you are unhappy here; or that anything I may have said—ever—should have made you cry."

"Oh, it was not you at all," said she, quickly. "I assure you it had nothing to do with you, nothing whatever."

And into these words Miss Dixon managed clearly to insinuate the meaning:—"Nothing you could do or say could ever fail to be a matter of indifference to me?" There the conversation ended, and Godfrey left her without quite knowing what feeling was uppermost in his mind; but it was certainly not brotherly. By-and-by he began to take himself to task; to realise how wrongly he had been acting in allowing himself to be carried so far away from his allegiance to Elspeth. He would go across to the Vicarage this morning, and atone by new devotion for his secret infidelity.

Passing through the gate to cross the meadow, he saw Mary walking in the garden. Instinctively he hesitated for a moment and then went straight on to the meadow, with a feeling that he was doing something heroic in avoiding her. As he turned to shut the gate he saw Ernest Underwood come up to the house, and instantly regretted his own heroism. He turned round again and saw that they had met,

and were talking gravely and earnestly. And the lull in his emotions was over. What did Ernest, who was supposed to be studying hard for some examination or other, want to be always dangling about the Abbey for? What business had a mere lad like that to be thinking of getting married—if that was the meaning of his visits? And what on earth did Miss Dixon mean by encouraging the boy? She had told him last night that she had never loved: surely she could not give her affection now to a foolish, hair-brained young fellow not as old as herself? Godfrey was so much irritated by the silly and unreasonable conduct of these young people that when he got to the Vicarage field and saw that none of the Thornhills were about he turned back again. Meeting one of the Vicarage servants, he heard that the Vicar's family had gone out for the day. All in a moment, as he was sauntering along, a question darted into his mind—why did Mary Dixon object to his leaving home; and exact a promise from him that he would not leave? What could it be to her, whether he went away or stayed? Could it be that she was afraid he might employ himself in more investigations concerning her past life, and not in Norfolk this time, but in Rome? The next moment he hated himself for the thought.

He had sauntered towards the farm, and saw Mr. Wilding standing at his gate, apparently waiting for someone. As Godfrey accosted him, a gentleman, rather loosely attired, came out of the house and joined him. "Sorry to keep you waiting, sir," said the stranger, "but I had to finish a letter. I——" at that moment his eyes fell upon Godfrey, and he stopped short in what he was about to say, and looked at him keenly. Nothing more was said, however, and he walked away with the farmer at a brisk pace. He looked about five-and-thirty, was of middle height, or nearly so, and broad about the shoulders; with a dark, olive skin, a mass of thick grey hair, and long, full grey whiskers. The tones of his voice sounded singularly soft and persuasive; almost more so than in a man is pleasant to the ear. It was not quite pleasant to Godfrey's.

"That is your lodger?" he remarked to Nancy, who came forth to him from the door, drying a tea-pot with a cloth.

"Yes, sir, that's Mr. Cattermole," she answered. "He is going into Cheston with my father before dinner."

"I've seen him sitting about the fields, I think, taking his sketches. Is he much of an artist?"

"He seems to be fonder of smoking and lounging about than of anything else: as you used to be, Master Godfrey," added she, with a twinkle of her black eye. "He brings home a sketch now and then, and I think he has talent if he'd only be industrious and exercise it. He might be good at portraits, I fancy."

"Why do you fancy that?"

"Well, it was rather an odd thing," began Nancy. "This morning—but I dare say you would not care to hear it, Master Godfrey."

"Yes, I should," said Godfrey; who, too proud to disturb Miss Dixon and Ernest Underwood, had nothing to do with his time just then. "Tell it me."

The tale that Nancy told was this: That morning her mother sent her into the best parlour, to ask for the *Cheston Chronicle*, which had been lent to their lodger the previous day. He was sitting at the table painting a face, apparently sketched off then quickly and roughly. So Nancy thought, as she, not being troubled with any superfluous reticence, looked over his shoulder in passing.

"What a good likeness!" she exclaimed.

"To you?" lightly replied Mr. Cattermole.

"To me, no. To Miss Dixon."

"Who is Miss Dixon?"

"The young lady at the Abbey."

"Oh, ah! I remember now. I've seen her at a distance: a quiet-looking, pale girl."

"You must have seen her near also," retorted Nancy, laughing, "to take that sketch of her—and to catch the bright shade on her dark hair, and the pretty colour of her brown eyes."

"You are very clever, Miss Nancy; but I give you my word of honour this is not meant for any Miss Dixon," returned the artist. "It is the likeness of a young lady I met abroad and afterwards lost sight of. I have done it from memory."

"It *is* like Miss Dixon, anyway, and wonderfully like," concluded Nancy, as she turned away to look for the newspaper amidst Mr. Cattermole's untidy pile of journals scattered on the side tables.

After finding it, which took a few minutes, she was leaving the room, when he, who had been working quickly, spoke. "Is it like her now?"

"Oh!" screamed out Nancy; as she looked at the sketch again.

"What a shame!"

He had made the hair and eyebrows red, put lines to the forehead and wrinkles to the mouth; it was a middle-aged face now, and not at all like Miss Dixon's.

"What a shame!" repeated Nancy: and the artist laughed in merriment.

This little occurrence she now repeated to Godfrey: adding that she believed he must have caught Miss Dixon's likeness surreptitiously, but did not like to confess it.

"Like his impudence!" ejaculated Godfrey, drawing himself up.

Wishing Nancy good morning, and supposing young Underwood must have gone by this time, he passed through the plantation to the garden. There he saw Miss Dixon and Ernest with their backs towards him, walking very slowly and talking more earnestly than ever. He approached them across the grass; and, quite unintentionally, heard something that Mary was saying.

"That may be. But he is mean enough to have played the spy. I cannot and will not trust him."

"Oh, no; Godfrey is a good fellow——" Ernest was beginning in answer, when the subject of their talk appeared by their side.

"What is that about Godfrey?" he asked, with perfect ingenuousness; not as if he had heard anything.

"Oh, nothing that is not complimentary, you may be sure," laughed Ernest. "We were just saying that you were the most active, energetic, amiable——"

"Good-tempered," suggested Miss Dixon.

"Yes; and good-tempered young man, within the region of our acquaintance."

"Thank you, my kind friends," said Godfrey, drily. His appearance having disturbed the interest of the talk, Ernest took his leave. Mary was turning to the house when Godfrey stopped her.

"Don't go in directly, please, Miss Dixon. I want to say something to you."

He spoke carelessly, but he saw the colour rise to her face and then leave it white and wan.

"It is nothing of any consequence," he added, more carelessly still. "You know last night, when we had all that long and tedious explanation in the gallery, exposed to every sort of danger from ghosts and robbers, not to speak of Hawkins——by the way, though," he broke off, "I have had Mr. Hawkins before me this morning, and he strenuously denies, in a most injured tone, having been in any passages but his own; so perhaps it was only my fancy, after all."

He said this to reassure her fears—if she had any on the score. But he could see that she was in a fever of anxiety for him to go on with what he had begun.

"Well, when it was over and we had come to the formal reconciliation, do you remember that, to seal the bond, you made me promise not to leave the Abbey?"

"Yes."

"I want you to let me retract that promise, for I am simply dying to be off and doing something. I cannot any longer bear this idle life. I think of going to London, to a relative of ours, of whom you have heard us speak—Abbotsford. He is in the government, and may be able to get me some post that will at least occupy my time and thoughts. I don't care for pay."

"But I can't let you retract it, Mr. Godfrey. It was part of our agreement, our act of reconciliation. *Indeed* I wish you to stay."

"That I may be the target for you and Ernest Underwood to lance your arrows at?"

"No, no, *no*," she repeated, warmly. "I want you to stay for my—for my sake. Sometimes a vague dread lies upon me, of some unknown danger, and I have no protector. You spoke last night of your sister Isabel: will you let me be as your sister, in case of need?"

Godfrey would not have left the Abbey after that. He took her

hand. "As my true sister," he said: "I ask nothing better." For the present, he added mentally.

"Thank you," she softly whispered: and he saw the tears rush to her eyes.

"Talking of promises," resumed Godfrey, "do you remember one you made to me?"

"No. What was it?"

"That you would sing to me again."

Mary looked out before her very gravely, and did not answer immediately. "I would do so willingly," she presently said, "but I hardly see how I can. Mamma has an insuperable dislike to my singing; she thinks it tries me too much; and I do not care to go against her will: she would be so very angry if she heard me."

Godfrey was silent. Of course he could not urge her to anger her mother by singing in her hearing; and Mrs. Mayne seemed not to be going out much just now. A happy thought came to him.

"You sing sacred music. Why not come into the church and sing to the organ?"

"Well—I hardly know. I should like to fulfil my promise, as you have been good to me. But I should not wish for anyone else to hear me sing; and perhaps someone or other might be coming in."

"Not the least danger of it," cried Godfrey, eagerly. "Nobody goes in, that I know of, but the Thornhills—and myself once in a way. The Thornhills are away to day; so that you might come this afternoon with safety. If you would; if you did not mind?"

"Then I will," she answered. "Shall we say three o'clock?"

"That will do excellently. Thank you. I have to go out for my father this morning, but I shall be back long before three o'clock."

So the bargain was made, and they parted good friends. Godfrey started with Croft, the head groom, in the dog-cart about midday, for a small village across country. Mr. Mayne was changing his under-groom, and Godfrey's errand was to enquire the character of a young man who had applied for the place.

But Godfrey was detained longer than he expected to be, and it was past three o'clock when he dashed in. He made his way at once to the churchyard. In it, to his surprise, he saw Sir William Hunt, walking up the pathway before him. The Baronet unceremoniously put his arm within that of the younger man.

"I thought I should find you somewhere about here," said he. "You said you would play the organ for me: Thornhill and your father told me I ought to hear it, you know; seemed to take it as a slight on the instrument that I had not yet been. Godfrey," he added, after a pause, dropping his voice, "I have been but twice to service in the church here since my boy died."

"And that is two years and a half ago, I think, sir."

"Yes, yes; it was at carnival time. Poor William, poor William!"

They were just inside the porch when the sweet and glorious tones

of one of the sweetest and most glorious voices ever heard, broke upon their ear in a sacred song.

Godfrey stood entranced, forgetting everything. He was recalled by a sharp, convulsive pressure upon his arm. Turning in alarm to Sir William, he saw his face likewise convulsed, as in an agony.

"You are ill, Sir William!" cried Godfrey.

"Hush! Listen!" responded Sir William; and Godfrey thought he must be affected by the magnificence of the singing.

But before the song had come to an end, a terrible remembrance flashed into Godfrey's brain, of what Sir William had said at the dinner-table. Of the woman with the sweet voice who had helped to lure his son to his death—the voice which was without compare, and which he should undoubtedly know again. The agony depicted in Sir William's face was equalled by that which sprang up in Godfrey's heart. Sir William touched him.

"It is the same voice and the same song. It must be the same woman. Let me go in and denounce her."

"Wait here," gasped Godfrey. "It will be best. She must come out this way. Wait for me."

Leaving Sir William in the porch, Godfrey went in and stole rapidly to the organ, at which Mary Dixon was seated. She felt a hand laid sharply on her shoulder, and looking round, was startled by the wild look of his pale face.

"Come here," said he in a very low voice, but with so much authority that she rose at his bidding. He still had his hand on her shoulder, and as soon as she was on her feet, he forced her across the narrow chancel with an energy which was little short of violence. The organ was on one side the chancel; the vestry was on the other, and the key was in the lock. Godfrey turned it, opened the door, and said "Go in there."

In her astonishment at this imperative movement, Mary had had neither breath nor presence of mind to resist; but she made a feeble show of it now, and would have drawn back. Godfrey pushed her in; shook off the hand which had placed itself in remonstrance on his coat-cuff, and locked the door.

All had passed so quietly that the girl who had been blowing, and was busily employed now in shutting the organ up with a great clatter, had noticed nothing. As Godfrey returned, she was coming forth, looked surprised to see him, and then gazed about her.

"Why, where's Miss Dixon, sir?" she asked.

"Miss Dixon is gone. And you had better go, too, as fast as you can. A gentleman is waiting outside to see the organ."

Away went the girl in swift commotion. And, just outside the church door, she came face to face with Sir William Hunt.

(To be continued.)

MY SATURDAYS.

HERMAN.

I.

HE was a poet and a drysalter. I have not the least idea, myself, what drysalting is; but I know that it is some occupation equally inimical to poetry and to gentility. Nevertheless, Herman Pothinger was also a gentleman. In addition to that, he was a hunchback. Can you put all these together, and realise a soul shut in upon all sides with limitations, beset with petty trials and great deprivations, and feeling them all the more deeply because his sufferings were vulgarised by the golden setting of his wealth. It might have consoled many people: he said to me once, when some had been paying him a good deal of attention: "I am an ugly picture set in a big gaudy frame; the gilding glitters so that the thing inside cannot be unnoticed."

He had not that way of escape, either, which true genius would have given him—genius that would have caught up his quivering nature, and carried it on eagle wings to the top of Olympus, to be satiated with the rapturous calm of the gods. We called him a poet, as friends and neighbours call anyone they know who can write pretty verses; but he was not one in the higher sense of the word, and he knew it. He had all a poet's keen sensibility, and suffered for it; but he had no creative genius, and little power of making others see what he saw, and feel what he felt. His verses were often clever, sometimes graceful, occasionally powerful, and always correct; but they were laboured and polished, and you felt that he would never do anything greater than he had done. This fact he had recognised himself, and determined to keep to his drysalting. I remember one afternoon, about a year after his father's death, he came into my drawing-room, where he had always been a tame cat, and threw himself down on the sofa. He liked the sofa, partly because his back was often painful—and partly, I think, because his deformity was not visible when he was lying down.

"Tired, Herman?" I said.

"Rather," he answered.

"Worried a little too, aren't you?"

"Well, yes. Life is somewhat more troublesome than usual to-day."

"What's the matter?"

"Some bother with my people at Nine Elms. A little plan which I thought would be for their good has turned out all wrong. I took a great deal of pains about it, and thought it would work, but they don't like it. I made a mess, I suppose, as usual."

"Herman," I said, "I wonder that you go on with that business."

"So do I," he answered, contemplating the ceiling.

"It is quite unsuited to your tastes."

"Cela va sans dire."

"It is not necessary for your support—or even comfort."

"Not exactly."

"It is a disadvantage to you socially."

"I am quite aware of that."

"Then why on earth don't you give it up?"

"And instead, do—what?"

"Travel, study, live in Italy, or Algeria, or the Rocky Mountains, or everywhere by turns, take in impressions, absorb nature, and write at your leisure such poetry as you will never write while you are oscillating between a Tamston villa and a London drysaltery."

He started up vehemently. "How can you!" he cried. "Don't I know every turn and twist of that wretched, sneaking temptation? I am to give up my honest father's honest business, because certain fools don't think it genteel. Snobs! they are the worst of snobs, who sentimentalize about hearts under smock-frocks, but can't see a man behind an apron, unless it be a bishop's!"

"I am sure you never wear an apron, Herman," I put in.

"Don't you be too sure of it then, or your feelings might receive a shock if you ever came near my place at Nine Elms. But I beg your pardon for supposing that anything could ever bring you to so plebeian a neighbourhood."

"You are not fair to me, Herman. You know I am not a snob. But when most people have certain prejudices, why should you put yourself at a disadvantage unnecessarily."

"It is not unnecessarily. Of course I could sell the business, and have enough to live a lazy, self-indulgent, solitary life, as I chose. But my mother would not have what she has been used to—luxuries, no doubt; but she would feel their loss now. My sisters would not have fortunes such as they have a right to expect. You know my poor father left every penny to me; I wish he hadn't. A great many things that I have money for now would miss it, and one or two would come to grief."

"Things?" I said interrogatively.

"There's a little hospital that couldn't very well get on by itself, and some other things. And why should I give up the little good I can do, and the work I was born to, and disappoint my own family? Why am I to do it?" he demanded, sitting up straight on the sofa.

"I am sure I don't know," I said, frightened by his vehemence into forgetting all the good reasons why he *should* do it.

"Yes; but you do know, and I know; I am to do it in order to dawdle, and lounge, and dream away my life, seeing pretty things, and calling it studying art; doing pleasant things, and calling it studying life; dozing with a cigar under the trees, and calling it studying

nature! And if emasculating one's soul into laziness and self-pleasing were the way to grow into a poet, nevertheless I should not be one at the end of a dozen years. I haven't it in me, and I know it. The worst time of my life was when I found that out; but now I've settled that matter with myself. No, Mrs. Singleton, God hasn't made a poet of me. I am nothing more than a dilettante, and a verse-spinning amateur, with a house full of bric-à-brac, a head full of Théophile Gautier, and a heart full of chips and sawdust."

"I beg your pardon," I said, "and if you have made up your mind that it is right for you to keep on the business, I will not tease you any more—but I must just say one thing."

"Well, what?"

"The social disadvantage is not merely a fanciful one. You might find it very practical when you wished to marry."

"As if any girl worth loving would love a thing like me!" he said, so bitterly that I dared not add another word.

After that conversation, I never (as may be supposed) tried again to induce Herman to cease to be a drysalter, and if anyone else did, he or she was equally unsuccessful. The Pothinger family continued to inhabit the gorgeous riverside villa, set in its border of grass-garden, like a large pie on a small dish; Mrs. and the Misses Pothinger still drove down the short avenue in their great carriage, and emerged at the gilt-topped gates, amid the curtsies of the lodge-keeper's little girls, to issue their orders at shop-doors to bareheaded attendants; and Herman still slipped quietly up and down to and from London by his daily trains, and when at home retreated to his own two rooms, the only ones in that big house that were really fit for a human being of sensibilities to inhabit, or else lived on the river. Taunton saw little of him in a general way; but he did not refuse any invitation which seemed really meant to be accepted, and he often came to me.

My Saturday afternoon parties were a very good thing for him. Coming to them regularly, he was drawn into a little clique of congenial spirits, and came to be on easy terms with others who were not congenial. People who were inclined to be shy of the rich tradesman found a difficulty in connecting him with the large-eyed, fragile cripple—whose refined face and painful limps appealed to their sympathies; and after a time, Herman Pothinger seemed more likely to be petted than snubbed, especially among the young ladies. I knew, however, that not one of those girls who begged to hear his poems, and were eager to get up conversation games under the trees, instead of playing tennis, would have dreamed of marrying a hunchback, and that anyone who did would be held to have sold herself for money; and I sometimes feared that there might be a sharp sting hidden in their sweet fruit of courtesy, so freely offered him by fair hands.

In the midst of all his friendliness, a special intimacy with Charlotte

Stamwood soon began to grow up, and lift its head above the rest, like the rose bush in the middle of an old-fashioned flower-bed. (You see, in telling the story of a poet, I am growing poetical enough myself to use fanciful comparisons.) Charlotte, as I have said before, was our vicar's second daughter; and she was also chief clergywoman of the parish, and mainstay of the family. Miss Stamwood was very delicate, and Mrs. Stamwood belonged to the ignoble army of the Non-Effectives. She would have been much surprised to hear herself so classed; for her code of duty was not severe, and she fulfilled it to her own satisfaction. She had presented the Vicar with an amply sufficient family—there they were to testify; she worked at their clothes, and was seldom seen without a needle in her hand; she saw to their meals; they were on the whole as good-looking, healthy, well-dressed, and well-taught children as anybody else's. What more could be expected of a mother? And yet, for any real mothering, the children had to come to Charlotte, and they did not come in vain. So in the parish, Mrs. Stamwood presided (as be seemed her position) over the head class in the girls' Sunday-school, and taught them something—by help of Eugene Stock; once a week she looked in at the day-school, when the girls were at needlework, and criticised their stitches: and occasionally she sat for ten minutes in some old woman's cottage. School-teaching and visiting—what more could be expected of any parsoness? But it was Charlotte who toiled to bring the school up to inspection-pitch; it was Charlotte who knew the family history and individual shortcomings of every scholar; it was Charlotte who dressed children's scalds, and gave her opinion upon old women's bad legs, and sat up at night with sick girls, at critical times.

Thus it came to be natural to her to cherish to be good to any small or weak creature that came near her; and if she saw anyone who wanted anything done for them, temporally or spiritually, her first impulse was to take them in hand in her strong, gentle, effective way. She soon found out that Herman Pothinger wanted a great deal done for him, and naturally proceeded to do it. The pathos in his eyes implored her every day they met; and every day she would join him in literary discussions, and talks about higher things, purely and merely in order to help one who was much tried to bear his burden. It was very nice of her; it was pretty to see such unconsciousness, and it was pleasant to watch Herman brightening out of his hopeless self-repression; but that would happen when she discovered that he was simply humanly in love with her, and he discovered that she had been succouring him as a distressed parishioner?

I knew better by this time than to lift a finger to make or mar a match, so I waited to see.

II.

WINTER had come, and only the ghost of my Saturdays had survived the dull afternoons and pale twilights. By the time the January floods

had gone down, and a long frost set in with February, I began to feel quite at liberty to dispose of myself on the day which had formerly been appropriated to hospitality. Consequently I did not feel bound to be churlish when Herman Pothinger came in one Friday evening to entreat me to go to his villa the next day.

"I am going to have an entertainment, Mrs. Singleton, on Saturday, of my own; but you seem to have a sort of vested interest in that day of the week, which will make me feel as if I had stolen it unless you condone my audacity by your presence."

"Oh, I'm not such a dog in the manger as to wish to keep a monopoly that I cannot use," I said; "besides, it is a very good exchange to be entertained instead of entertaining. What is to be the shape of your festivity?"

"Pretty nearly the shape of the field next the garden, at the back of the house. It is nearly all flooded, from the overflowing of the pond in the corner, and the ice is magnificent. I have had it swept and watered until it is a perfect rink, and the weather is safe: there is not a sign of a thaw. So my mother and the girls are asking everybody who can put on skates or cares to look on, and we will have a jolly afternoon. There will be music to skate to, and torches, and so on—and tea, of course."

"Torches and tea; that is irresistible, provided I am not expected to walk round and round the pond all the afternoon, and pretend I am warm."

"Not a bit of it; you shall have a warm place to creep into, and a pretty place, too—you'll see. Only come."

Of course I went. The skaters had assembled to luncheon at two, and were vigorously at work when I arrived. Although Herman's invitation had been short, on account of the uncertainty of all things glacial in England, his preparation had been ample. All round the little lake, bright-coloured bands looped up curtains of rough, dark stuff, supported by poles and ropes, so as to shelter the guests both from wind and from the eyes of the curious outside. Inside the circle were seats in abundance, with footstools and rugs, and chaufferettes for cold feet, while tea and coffee came hot from a nice little stove, presided over by a cosy maid. A band was established under shelter at a discreet distance, and the strains of lively dance music timed the movements of the performers. It was a glorious day, and the sight was a pretty one. Round and round they swept, back and forwards, swaying, gliding, whirling—rosy faces, soft furs, active figures; the air was alive with chatter and laughter and music, and a half-moon floated in the steel-blue sky, unextinguished by the pale sunlight, and looked down on the scene, taking no part in the mirth, but not disapproving of the poor mortals who could still laugh. Herman was one of these; he did not seem to feel it a trial that he could not join the fun on the ice, but moved about, playing the host to perfection, seeing to everyone's wants, and making him-

self thoroughly pleasant. I had never seen him to such advantage as on his own ground. The affection which I entertained for him did not in the least extend to his mother and sisters; pretentious, uninteresting women, I thought them, and the less I saw of them the better I was pleased.

The afternoon slipped on pleasantly; when people grew tired of the pond they could go into the house, or through the big green-houses, which crowded up the moderate-sized garden. It began to grow dark, and then the promised torches came into play. Chinese lanterns were hung from all the posts, the bonfires were lit, and torches were handed to the skaters. A row of little lanterns crossed the ice, and shut off one corner; this marked the position of the original pond, the source of the overflow. I knew that it was deep, and contained one of the strong springs not uncommon in our part of the Thames Valley, and applauded Herman's prudence.

About eight o'clock, Herman began giving instructions to the gentlemen skaters, from which I augured that something was going to take place. A great deal of commotion followed, but after much talking and moving about, the skaters got themselves arranged in pairs in a long procession, headed by Dr. Carfield and Cherry Roper, whose engagement had just been announced.* The band struck up a delicious waltz, and the long train glided off, closely following the leading pair. This was one of the prettiest things I had ever seen. The coil of lights swept round and round in curves and tangles, following the erratic movements of its leaders, entwining, disentangling, wreathing its live flames into fanciful figures—the light-bearers only visible as dark forms rushing past the blazing fires on the bank—and no sound but a subdued murmur of voices, below the music that harmonised their motions.

Herman was standing by me, watching, when the band ceased playing, and the procession gathered itself into groups, and came to the bank. Charlotte Stamwood glided up to us, excited beyond her wont.

"Oh! I wish it could have lasted for ever," she said. "To go on and on like that, in the darkness and the light, and the music—it was like nothing else: it was fairyland. That was a glorious idea of yours, Mr. Pothinger; it was so good of you to think of giving us such a pleasure."

"I can imagine the delight of using one's muscles, nearly as well as if I had any worth using," he replied; "perhaps better. Perhaps I fancy it to be even a greater joy than it is."

Charlotte looked at him pitifully, all her gaiety gone. In the revulsion from her excited enjoyment, her eyes filled with tears. Herman saw it.

"But now," he said, "I want everybody to come in and have supper. I am so glad you have enjoyed the end of the day, Miss Stamwood,

* See "Cherry Roper's Penance," *Argosy*, October, 1883.

for I have watched you all the afternoon devoting yourself to the children, and dragging about those two awkward Miss Bushes, whom you will never make skaters of until you can make them sylphs."

"I am sure I am not a sylph, though I am a skater," rejoined Charlotte. "Proof positive: did you ever hear of a sylph whose heart danced within her at the prospect of supper? Yet such is my degrading position at present, in spite of a most un-sylphlike luncheon at two, and afternoon tea ad libitum."

"Nothing like winter air for giving one an appetite," I remarked. Herman took off her skates, and we all proceeded to the house, where a very substantial meal was in readiness, which people who had not been imbibing the best Moning for half the afternoon would have called a meat tea. Herman placed himself between us, and we had a very lively time, Charlotte being particularly kind to him in her motherly way. When we rose to leave the table, however, she discovered that she had lost one of her bracelets.

"I know I had it on when we began the torch-dance," she said; "I remember setting it over my glove."

"Is it a valuable one?" I asked.

"Not very; but I would not lose it for a great deal. My brother Robert gave it to me before he went to sea; he had been saving up his pocket money to buy it for ever so long, dear boy! Oh! I hope it may be found, even if it is broken. Mr. Pothinger, will you let me have a lantern, and I will go down to the pond and look for it at once?"

"I will go myself," he answered; "you must have dropped it on the ice; you shall have it again in a few minutes." And before we could say a word to him he was gone.

Charlotte and I waited uncomfortably for a few minutes, not knowing what else to do; and then she said suddenly:

"Mrs. Singleton, I don't like it at all. He went off in such a hurry, he may not have taken a servant with him, and it is not safe for him to go upon that ice. It is like glass now, after the day's skating."

"I am afraid you are right," I said: "but what can we do?"

"Go down after him, of course; do come at once!"

She hurried me out; we hastily snatched up somebody's wraps from a chair in the hall, and ran down the garden. All the paths were still lighted, so we had no trouble in reaching the enclosure. Charlotte eagerly lifted a curtain, and we passed inside. The Chinese lantern had been removed; but the bonfires were burning, and by their light we saw Herman in the middle of the pond, alone, slowly making his way along, stooping and examining the ice by the light of the lantern which he held. Charlotte caught my hand.

"Don't call out to him," she said; "it might startle him, and make him slip. Oh! I shall never forgive myself if he is hurt."

He was moving along the cord which marked off the dangerous

part of the pond. Presently he gave an exclamation, and we saw his light glitter on something lying just inside the line. He stooped under to pick it up, and in doing so his foot slipped, he fell on his back, and slid along the ice. There was a crack, a splash of water, and his lantern lay broken, the light inside giving a moment's glimpse of a dark ugly hole, and a flood of water, swallowing up the glossy surface. I shrieked for help; Charlotte gave one clear loud cry, and rushed down, and on to the ice, I after her. When we reached the hole, Herman's white face had risen, and he was clinging to the ice, which broke away under his hands.

"Stretch out your arms and reach," cried Charlotte; "don't hold it with your hands. Don't struggle; help is coming." She laid herself down flat on the ice, and drew herself towards the hole. "Kneel down, Mrs. Singleton; hold my feet with all your strength."

I obeyed, and she stretched out her hands until she could clasp Herman's numbed fingers in the freezing water.

"I have him," she cried. "Now call—call with all your might."

I called, but no one came. The thick curtains shut in our cries; the ice cracked and cracked; the bitter cold water came flooding round us, soaking us to the skin, chilling us to the bone; what was it for that fragile creature, plunged in it up to his neck?

"He must be got out," said Charlotte. "Let me move forward a little."

She pushed herself nearer to him, and slid her hands up to his arms. The ice broke away as she dragged him forward, but they were moving shorewards, and presently he got his foot on the bottom. He raised himself; she clasped him round the body; and using all her strength, and helped by me, rose to her knees and her feet, and lifted him out. Then Herman spoke the first word that he had uttered. He had sunk without a cry; he was drowning mutely; he had not spoken during the long struggle. Now he said:

"You have saved my life: but you have only saved what was your own. I am yours, body and soul."

Then he staggered, and fainted.

III.

OUR joint adventure and wetting affected the three of us in varying degrees. Charlotte went about her work as usual the next day, and laughed at the numerous enquiries after her health; I caught a violent cold, but was not materially the worse; Herman fell seriously ill. The fall, the shock, and the chill were more than enough to account for any consequences to so delicate an organisation, and I feared the worst. Shut up in my room for several days, I could only send to enquire, and had to be content with the official bulletins issued by Mrs. Pothinger, on the authority of the great London physician who patronised Dr. Carfield's treatment. These wore to my mind an obvious air of "making the best of it"—which I distrusted. I was

therefore doubly glad to see Charlotte Stamwood enter my room on the first day when I was sitting up. After mutual enquiries, &c., I asked her if her father had seen Herman lately.

"Yes," she said, gravely; "he was there yesterday, but he can only stay for a few minutes at a time. Mr. Pothinger likes to see him, but he is in too great pain to be able even to listen long—much less speak."

"Then he has not made much progress towards getting well yet?"

"I don't think he has begun."

"Oh, Charlotte," I cried, the tears starting into my eyes, for I felt weak and low, "what a miserable ending to such a pleasant day!"

"If you feel that," she answered, "what do you suppose I feel? I—who was enjoying myself all day like a child, using his unselfish thoughtfulness as if it were a matter of course, taking all the good of the pleasures he had given, but could never share; and then let him go to his death on my errands."

"You could not have stopped him," I said; "it is absurd to blame yourself."

"I could, if I had thought of it in time; but I was only thinking of my bracelet. It was clutched in his hand when I pulled him out; I have it now: he ought to have thrown it in my face, like the lady's glove in Schiller's ballad."

"Charlotte," I said severely; "it is not like you to be so morbid. You never asked or wished Herman to go for it; nobody could have anticipated that if he did go he would come upon the unsafe ice; you did your utmost to stop him, and if he lives, your courage and presence of mind will have saved his life. If he dies, it may be the happiest thing for him, for life had not much to offer him, and it will be sweet to him to die in serving you."

"That is the worst of it," she said in a low tone. "I cannot bear to think of his dying; and yet, what shall I do if he gets well?"

I was silent.

"You heard what he said before he fainted?"

"Yes."

"Can't you help me? I would not ask you if I had not thought and cried myself stupid in trying to see what is right?"

"My dear Charlotte, it doesn't exactly seem to me a matter of right or wrong. Consult your own heart."

"My heart! Mrs. Singleton, you don't fancy that I can be in love with him, poor fellow!"

"It did not seem probable, of course. Still, you are not like all other girls, and you seemed to like talking to him, and so on. I must own that I did think you were fond of him."

"Fond of him! that is exactly what I am. I wanted to try and comfort him, and help him along a bit, just as one takes a tired child by the hand; and now he turns round, and begs to be taken up in my arms! And I am so sorry for him, and he is so good, and loves me

so, that I would do anything for him, if he were my brother or my cousin, or it could be done in any way but by marrying him."

"Of course you could not be expected to give up your life to such a task, unless you really loved him."

"You don't understand," she said, impatiently. "It is not the giving up my life; we must give it up to something or somebody, and it might as well be to Herman as to the schools and the parish; it is the—the—disgracefulness of the thing. You know what he is—poor fellow, there is no denying that he is terribly deformed; nobody would believe that I loved him for himself, and I could not say that I did, in lover's fashion. And he is so horribly rich; everybody would say that I did it for that; and they would congratulate me to my face, and sneer at me behind my back; and mamma would be so pleased to have me drive up in the carriage with a footman, and papa would never quite understand or believe in me again. I should not have sold myself, but I should feel as if I had. And after all, if one gives the goods, and receives the money, I suppose it is a sale?"

"The real price paid to you would be the power of filling Herman's life with sunshine," I said, foolishly.

"Do you think I ought, Mrs. Singleton? Are you persuading me?"

"Oh, no; not for worlds," I cried, terrified. "If you could have genuinely loved him, I think I should have felt that it was a beautiful thing; but such love as his is not to be repaid with mere pity and sisterliness, and sooner or later, he would feel the deficiency, and he would know that you were chafing under the falseness of your position. He is too sensitive not to be conscious of your feelings in any close relation."

"Then there seems to be no help for it," she said, with a sigh; "and he must learn to do without even the little that I have been giving him. Oh, poor Herman, poor Herman; why should he be refused everything?"

She sat looking into the fire, while her tears dropped slowly, and mine kept her company; for what else was there to do, while he lay in fevered misery, tossing between lonely death and lonely life?

IV.

As soon as I was able to go out, I bent my steps to Alexandra Villa, and was fortunate enough to meet Dr. Carfield at the gate. I asked him how his patient was getting on.

"He is much easier, and has little pain now; in that sense he is better. But there has been long-dormant mischief, which has now been aroused, and I have great fear for the result. In fact, his condition is very serious, and I would not answer for his life from one day to another."

"Is he conscious?"

"Oh, perfectly. I should think he would like to see you, if you would go up."

"I should wish it very much indeed."

Dr. Carfield returned to the house, and the matter was soon arranged. I was taken along the thickly-carpeted passages to Herman's cosy little sitting-room, once an artistic snuggery, where only the profusion of smoking material betrayed the sex of the owner. Now the pipes and tobacco were all neatly stowed away; a table covered with a white cloth bore glasses and medicines; and all the paraphernalia of scientific nursing stood ready in obtrusive order and cleanliness. A double curtain hung before the door, to deaden the sounds of the outer world, which at one time the tortured nerves of the sick man had not been able to bear. We passed through into the bedroom; a quiet nurse in uniform rose and left it as we entered, and in another minute I was alone with Herman.

He did not look as much changed as I had expected. His face had always been thin and pale, and his eyes large; and it did not make much difference in him, but now he was thinner, paler, and larger-eyed. I clasped his hand (what a skeleton it was, and what a feeble pressure it gave!), and said a few cheerful words about being glad that he was well enough to see me.

"Yes!" he said brightly, "so am I. Nurse Piper is the best of company for a mind disposed to reflection! for she takes the body thereto appertaining so completely under her charge that the proprietor feels no responsibility, and she never interferes with the higher mental exercises by frivolous remarks; nevertheless, do you know, I find her a trifle dull."

"I should think so," I said. "Now that you are well enough, I will come every day, if you like, and tell you everything that goes on in the world."

"Do, like a dear woman. I have not read a paper, nor heard a bit of gossip for thirteen days, and I still care about news from this world more than I ought, but I can't help it. So go ahead now, and tell me about everything."

I sat and chatted away to the best of my ability, Herman occasionally making remarks. At last I thought he ought to be quiet, and rose to leave.

"Are you going?" he said. "Well, you have been very good; and now I want you to do something more for me."

"I will do it, if possible," I answered.

"Ask Miss Stamwood if she will come with you to-morrow."

"Charlotte! My dear Herman, I am not sure that she would, or that she ought."

"What do conventionalities matter now?" he demanded. "She is braver than that."

"Yes, if it were to do you any real good. But I fear it will only do you harm."

"Do you fancy," he said scornfully, "that a dying hunchback is going to make love to her, or to take her visit for anything but gracious charity? Go to her, and tell her that I shall soon be beyond the reach and the need of her pity and help, but that I need her now. Tell her that those few mad words which broke from me that night were true—*true*; but they only told the truth—they did not mean a request, scarcely even a wish. I am hers, for life and death; but if I were to live, I would never ask her to be mine, she need not fear me. Ask her to come, that I may see her once more."

I asked her and she came.

She sat down by his bed, while I withdrew to the window; and as his poor thin hand lay on the coverlet, she clasped it in her own warm fingers, as frankly as a sister. On her wrist she wore the bracelet. He looked at it with a smile.

"I am so glad I kept hold of it."

"It has cost you too much," she answered.

"It has cost me nothing," he replied. "I am used to bodily pain; I rather like it, it is a change from the other; and what is life to such as I?"

She looked down, and her lips trembled.

"To lie here and hold your hand, and look at that bracelet, which tells me that I have been able to do something for you—is all that I can desire on this side of the grave."

"It is not much," said Charlotte.

"It is more than I have ever had before. You can scarcely realise how intensely lonely my life has been, with the great barrier of separation always between me and other men. As soon as I began to realise what any joy would be like, I had to go on and realise that it was not for me. That has been hard work sometimes."

"It *was* hard," she murmured.

"I have always been lonely, and hungry, and out in the cold," he went on, dreamily. "Now I feel as if the sun were shining on me—just a little glint, before it sets and the moon rises—the pale moon of Paradise, that gleams on scentless flowers."

"Paradise seems dim and pale to you," said Charlotte, brokenly, "because earth has been so dreary that you cannot believe in happiness. Oh, Herman, I cannot bear to let you go so. Live for my sake, and I will make life bright for you, until we are ready to go hand-in-hand to the deeper brightness beyond." She threw herself on her knees beside the bed, and gazed into his eyes.

"Is it possible?" he said, a slow ecstasy gathering in his face.

"Yes, it is possible," she answered fervently. "I will care for you, love you, make you happy; I will be your wife."

"All for me," he said, laying his hand on her head. "What for you?"

"The joy of doing it. Herman, it would make me happy."

"No," he answered, as his smile faded; "it would not. Not

happy as you ought to be. And I should not be happy, because I should be false to myself. I have long known that love and marriage were not for me. I have dared to love, and I bear the penalty, or rather, I have borne it, for penalties will soon be over."

"It need not be so," she pleaded: "consent to live; set your will to it; and you shall know what happiness is."

"Would you tempt me, dear, when I am too weak to resist long? I know what is right now; I may not be able to hold to it five minutes longer; but if so, I pray that I may die in four."

"Oh, hush," said Charlotte, rising from her knees. "Forgive me; I will not say another word; only let me be good to you, and do what I can."

"Then raise me a little; the pillows hurt my back, and I feel faint."

I went out to the nurse, who gave me food for him. When I brought it back, Charlotte was sitting on the bed, supporting Herman in her arms, his head lying on her shoulder. He looked at me with a smile.

"I have got a new mother, you see."

I gave him a spoonful or two.

"I can't take more," he said. "It doesn't matter." Then he looked up at Charlotte.

"Will you kiss me?"

She bent her head, and kissed the white upturned face that lay on her arm.

"This is heaven," he said, and closed his eyes.

When he looked again it *was* heaven.

VERA SINGLETON.



STAR-RISE.

FROM the last pale glow in the west that died,

A star shone over the sea:

Far down in the south a low wind sighed,

And soft came its voice to me:—

"Good night! for thy star is shining."

In the tender grace of the twilight fair,

A maiden walked by the sea:

I looked, and the dream of my dreams was there:—

And soft sang the wind to me:—

"Good night! for thy star is shining."

A. M. H.

THE CHANNEL ISLANDS.

By CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," "THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON," &c.



LEADING TO THE CREUX HARBOUR.

WE were fortunate, in Sark, in having the moon at the full. Thus the nights were as beautiful as the days; nay more so. The silvery light brought out in dark, mysterious relief all the deep valleys, illuminated the broad stretches of moorland, solemnized the cliffs and rocks, made visible

distant objects upon the flat table-land. The far off windmill, with sails for ever turning, as if, like Sysiphus, their work was never done, seemed in the moonlight to whirl its ghostly arms in a phrensy of despair. It was always going, this mill; whether we passed it by day or night, the rush and creaking of its wings might be heard above the roaring of the wind and the beating of the rain.

An amiable man was the Miller of Sark—for having no rival, we may give him this distinguishing title. And he was to be envied, as every one living in Sark is to be envied, though they know it not. He looked the picture of health and contentment, and in his white, floury suit was a cheerful and conspicuous object as he walked to and from his mid-day meal.

More than once, on coming across him at these times, we accompanied him to the threshold of his little home, and enlivened the way by fragments of gossip. They were all primitive and interesting, these people of Sark, and seemed blessed with an innate courtesy more to be desired than a polished manner which goes no deeper than the surface. True, we found the old shoemaker a somewhat

rough exception; but he had "travelled," and in extending his knowledge of mankind perhaps had lost his simplicity. Moreover he had not "stuck to his last," but had renounced his trade in favour of farming, had waxen fat and abundant, and was not to be lightly esteemed. Finally, we bearded the lion in his den at feeding time, and the steam from a savoury mess of pottage rose from the table like incense upon the air. So perhaps irritation and abruptness on the part of the Cobbler of Sark were to be overlooked. There were extenuating circumstances: *Ventre affamé n'a point d'oreilles*.

The exterior of the miller's house, like himself, was comely to look upon. A small garden led up to the creeper-laden porch. Flowers abounded, as they do in so many of the Sark cottages; large tree-fuchsias, calceolarias, and hydrangeas; plants blooming in the open air that in England we find often only in hothouses. It gave the habitations a refinement that lifted them above the ordinary level of their kind. They were evidently well cared for; their owners took pride in them; the inmates themselves must be out of the common. Here and there an aspiring attempt had substituted for its lattice a plate-glass window, but it was out of keeping with its simpler surroundings.

But with the miller all things were in harmony, and the interior, as neat as a new pin, as orderly as a museum, announced the careful housewife. He seemed happy as a king, scarcely knew an idle day, had many hungry mouths to feed. We offered him our sympathy in his matrimonial responsibilities, but it was lost upon him. He was one of those men whose contentment is a continual feast. They are the greatest of philosophers, and in passing through life, it is doubtful if they have not the best of it.

These cottages, with gardens well-tended and flower-laden, are one of the features of Sark, where features, beyond those bestowed by nature, are limited. There are a few better houses—such as that inhabited by the doctor—and then we come to the *Seigneurie*.

The Seigneur of Sark is lord of the manor. It was intimidating to be told, before going there, that he had complete power over the inhabitants; was a despotic monarch; could try cases at will, pass sentences, imprison, hang, behead. In short, he might have been to the full-grown imagination what Bluebeard is to the youthful fancy. Fortunately for our peace of mind, we could not discover that there was any prison upon the island, and we certainly saw neither block nor gibbet, nor chamber of torture. Moreover, we felt persuaded that to the people of Sark the greater crimes of the Decalogue must be unknown. The infirmities of human nature no doubt are theirs; some of its faults, follies, and foibles; but it was plain to any physiognomist that here they drew the line. The Seigneur, as administrator of justice, can be acquainted only with "maiden sessions," and if he is not presented with the customary white gloves, it must be that the primitive Sercquois know nothing of the

ceremony, or that in Sark they would be, like a white elephant, only too often a superfluous luxury.

The Seigneurie is the only place in Sark of any importance, so far as we discovered; the only spot in which one feels in some degree to have returned to the world. The remainder of the island may be said to have remained in a state of nature, and here lies one of its greatest charms. The house, picturesque, though not uniform in style, stands within grounds that may be described as a cultivated wilderness of great beauty. Tall Indian grasses and weeping trees reflect themselves in silent pools; small avenues lend their shade and retire-



THE SEIGNEURIE.

ment; an absence of set walks, straight paths and planned flower beds delights the wanderer; a few tropical plants and the waving grasses so common to the Channel Islands, and so graceful, inspire the imagination with something of an eastern glow. Fruit trees and flowers were there, but their primness and regularity are concealed behind high walls. This no doubt is necessary in a small island, where the influence of the sea and the fury of the gales would soon put an end to all tender and unprotected plants. For the Seigneurie is not far from the sea. It is in itself a small paradise within the larger paradise of Sark.

But Sark itself is small, being about three miles long by a mile and a half broad. Yet it is so diversified, possesses so much that is interesting, has such deep valleys and declivities, an abundance of

such magnificent rock scenery, that its limited area is never realised. In all else, indeed, it is great; has a strong influence upon mind and imagination; takes firm hold of the affections; is the Queen and the Pearl of islands.

Every day we loved it more. The roads, the breezy heights, the sombre valleys, the long stretches of heather ending in abrupt precipices, all grew familiar, never tame or monotonous. There was—I have said it before—an indescribable charm about Sark. It was subtle, ever present, almost tangible, yet could not be uttered. In all weathers it was there. If the sun shone, the sky simply laughed for joy, and the earth responded. All nature was lighted up with happiness. From head to foot one seemed to absorb health, the very



IN THE SEIGNEURIE GROUNDS.

breath of life. It was impossible to receive it sufficiently. The hours flew on silent wings. One longed to put back the sun, not ten but fifty degrees, and stay the glass of time that ran in such golden sands.

On the other hand, if the skies were gloomy and the sun was lost behind gathering clouds, the island threw up a deep rich tone full of grandeur. One hardly knew which aspect to like best, the sunny or the sad. The latter certainly predominated during our stay. Hours of sunshine we had, inexpressibly lovely, and days of gloom inexpressibly fine. It was nothing but a series of gales, one after another, and they were gales full of earnestness. Tremendous seas, furious winds, that would sometimes lull for an hour or two, only to gather fresh strength and rage, drenching rains that seemed to threaten a second deluge. But the rain fortunately was less constant than the wind, and seldom kept us at home.

Day after day, the market boat said "To-morrow we shall start," and day after day she was still to be found within the little harbour. It was impossible to attempt to cross over to Guernsey. No steamer arrived, telegraphic communication did not exist, the primitive little post-office had holiday, Sark was cut off from the world. Delicious rest and repose! For my own part, a month of such experience would have been too short a term; but H., I could see, would never have stood it. As day followed day he grew uneasy, and in tones more and more anxious, would say, "Suppose we are kept here for three weeks or a month?" I knew quite well that would not happen. One's opportunity—let us say it again—always comes; and through life we find that it almost always comes at the right moment. The necessity that must be met and can no longer be delayed brings the occasion. And—without desire to preach—why not? We are not children of chance and we are not here by chance. Chance is not, or ought not to be, the pilot of our life's little bark. Stormy waves and tempests we have, adverse winds that threaten to overwhelm, and rough seas that seem about to engulf; yet if the helm is only left to the guidance of a Higher Hand, even in this world we are certain of our haven. But, alas, that is our too frequent mistake; come what may, we take the direction into our own keeping, and blindly steer for all sorts of unseen rocks and shoals; and shipwreck of some sort or other—it may be moral, mental, material, our life's happiness, or our best hopes and ambitions—is the end of it all.

Coming down one morning we heard that the market boat had really gone at last. The sea was still rough, the winds blew, she would have a nasty passage enough, but they had ventured. Discomfort they did not mind, and, this morning, of danger there was none. So once more we felt put into communication with the outer world.

Night came, and we went down to meet the return of the little craft. It was about eight o'clock, and a most glorious evening. A strong wind was abroad, and immense detachments of clouds travelled quickly across the sky, casting deep lights and shadows upon the island. It was about the time of full moon, and her light was pure, silvery, and very vivid. The sky was gemmed with brilliant stars and moving constellations. Silence and solitude reigned over the face of the island. There was no sound anywhere, except in the wind, which seemed to fill all space, rustled the few trees we passed, and whistled and shivered through the hedges.

We left the inn, went down the hill, through the little gate, and across the shallow stream. Yet shallow as it was—not up to one's ankle in water—an old man had one day been found lying there, face downwards, drowned. He had lived to be one of the patriarchs of the island, only to come to this at last. Up another hill—thus following the road indicated by the old dame who had counselled us to "gome down the gommon"—and out into a narrow maddy land that seemed almost a quicksand. From this quagmire on to the broad

road, and passing a few solitary-looking houses, we found the long, steep hill leading to the Creux Harbour. One of the loveliest bits of Sark, to-night its beauty seemed almost more apparent than by day. Its charms, softened and in part hidden, appealed more vividly to the imagination. Trees met overhead in one long, unbroken arch, and the moonlight glinted through the branches and the leaves and cast shadows across our path. The road seemed interminable, for it was our first visit to the harbour. At length we reached the high cliffs, and the tunnels through which one must pass to enter or to leave the island; immediately beyond these was the little port.

It was a strange and powerful scene. The boat having safely braved the perils of the sea, was lying at the harbour steps. For the first time we found ourselves the centre of quite a crowd, on the stone pier. Everyone was excited, and everyone chattered in wonderful Sark patois. They might have been so many magpies wrangling over their possessions, and to us they were not one whit more intelligible than those sensible but mischievous birds.

The little crowd had come down to meet the boat, claim their goods, and hear the news. It was a mixture of satisfaction at commissions well executed, vexation at wishes only half carried out, and downright abuse where orders had been altogether forgotten: a Babel without its tower. Half a dozen carts and nondescript vehicles were ranged from the pier to the drawbridge at the entrance to the tunnel, and these were being laden with discharged cargo: bread, flour, meat, furniture—a medley and an accumulation. Philip de Carteret, one of the group, received a fresh store for the little shop his wife kept, the only one in the island, as far as we knew. He was also purveyor of literature to the inhabitants, and carried away a bundle of Guernsey newspapers, the only record to some of them of an outer and more active world. One man walked off with a table upon his head—perhaps he was about to set up housekeeping with some neat-handed Phyllis—and the twisted legs in the centre looked in the semi-gloom like some unknown and terrible thing of life.

Breakwater and people were thrown out in strong relief by the moon; the sea beyond, angry and tempestuous, dashed against the rocks and the stonework; the high and massive cliffs were in deeper shadow. A few boats in the harbour tossed restlessly at their moorings. The silent majesty of the dark sky above, of the clouds that travelled in such swift detachments, was in strange contrast with the excited scene below: this handful of men and women, unsparing of their gestures, whose voices echoed in all the surrounding cliffs and caves.

Then the little cavalcade moved off, a singular procession. One after another they passed through the tunnel, and began the long up-hill climb, and left the little harbour to solitude, the calm moonlight, the dark shadows, the beating and breaking waves. We followed in their wake. Once at the top of the hill, each went his way.

We varied ours; passed by the churlish old cobbler's, whose lighted window proved that he had not yet sought that repose so necessary to an irritable brain; down by the windmill, with its ghostly and revolving arms; and then, leaving the high road, plunged into the inequalities and uncertainties of fields and valleys.

In time we found we had safely done the common, crossed the shallow stream and passed through the gate. Beyond this we were on our own territories, and a few moments found us in the snug shelter and seclusion of the inn. Blinds were down and curtains drawn, a bright lamp stood on the table, the flames of a roaring fire flew up the chimney, H. was once more in the paradise of fire-wor-



A BIT OF SARK.

shippers. In that glorious night I could have remained out for hours, enjoying the moonlight and the clouds, the dark heathery stretches, the lonely valleys and the restless sea: everything in nature that was solemn and suggestive. And the strong wind that blew was neither harsh nor cold: it never seemed so here, either by night or day, but was unspeakably delicious and bracing, no matter how strong, or whence its quarter. As a rule, much wind is an abomination, at least to the present writer: in Sark it was a luxury and a blessing.

And it was always thus. Stormy days and nights succeeded each other, and the little island was in harmony with them. Even the autumn season, with its subdued tints and falling leaves, was a sort of minor key that adapted itself to the restless elements—a minor key, yet without melancholy.

That night walk to the Creux Harbour to reconnoitre the little market boat was only one of many. Especially I remember one more than usually boisterous evening, when nothing would move H. from his chimney-corner, and I wandered alone down to Dixcart Bay.

The scene was utterly desolate ; no sight of creature and no sound of life. The moonlit valley was grandeur itself. The sea broke against the rocks with a noise of thunder. A few steps more and there was the little beach, and the pebbles and stones were crunching beneath one's feet. Immense waves swept in and broke upon the shore with tremendous force. They dashed up the rocks, until the very earth seemed to vibrate with the shock, swirled over the "Giant's Leg," and poured through the arch with a hissing roar, whilst showers of spray



OUR "LITTLE GATE."

seemed to reach to the very table-land of the island. The whole sea, lighted up by the moon, was a restless, surging waste, and the waves died out in masses of foam, white as driven snow. On and on crept the tide, with rapid strides, swishing over the stones, until at last the shore was covered, and one had to beat a retreat.

Within the territory of the inn, the funny old goat, perched on its bit of rock, looked for a moment at the solitary wayfarer, and then, as if recognizing a friend, jumped down with plaintive bleat, and came the length of its tether to have its head rubbed, and to protest against being left the long lone night a prey to these raging elements.

But our excursions by day, with Philip de Carteret for our guide, charmed us most. He knew every inch of the island, and by paths invisible to the uninitiated would take us up and down rocks and cliffs that seemed impregnable. Sark is famous for its caves, and

they are numerous and interesting, though not very deep or profound, and therefore not mysterious. Of them, the Gouliots and the Bouliques are the principal, and some of them can only be seen at certain states of the tide, and at the time of full moon. Even then you must be careful not to stay too long, or you may have to wade out through advancing waters.

One morning we started for the Gouliot caves. We had to cross the island, and, passing through a field or two, reached the Gouliot rocks, some of the finest and grandest of Sark. Here, at the summit of the cliffs, were two ladies. It was the first time we had come upon anyone in our rambles, and it was one of the least pleasant days, for, in addition to wind and clouds, there was rain. These ladies were evidently bent upon the same mission as ourselves. One of them, however, either took fright at this unexpected and masculine reinforcement, or at the rugged and really terrific-looking cliffs that had to be scaled, and gave up the attempt. She sat herself down on a projecting bit of rock, like Patience on a monument, whilst her companion more bravely followed in our wake.

The descent seemed almost perilous. How the fair lady managed we could only imagine; she was independent, and would not accept help, and therefore the only alternative was to leave her to make her way unnoticed.

At last we found ourselves at the mouth of the caves, but our difficulties were not over; rather they had only begun. There were caves within caves, caves beyond caves. Of course, the inner cave was the most interesting, but it could not be seen without wading through deep waters. They were gloomy, these caves, though not dark. The sides were in parts smooth as a built-up wall, but rugged and protruding where most obscure, so that an unwary head might receive its quietus when least expected, or at least a blow that no skull but an Irishman's could stand against. The walls were covered with barnacles, sponges, sea anemones, exquisite specimens of zoophytes and coralines; such a collection and such colours, surely, as can only be found here and there in the earth's recesses. The walls were gemmed and studded with these wonders and curiosities of sea life.

An arched opening admitted from one cave to the other, but this troublesome pool lay between. For once we had to accept our guide's help. Hoisted on his shoulders, he staggered across the slippery and uneven bottom, and high and dry, landed us on the other side. But how about the lady? He returned and offered to carry her over in his arms, which could have been done quite easily and without much loss of dignity. She would none of it, and he came on to us. The cave, at least sixty feet high, was splendid. It reached upwards like a temple dome, and was almost circular. Light came from above; our voices echoed solemnly in the deep recesses of the roof, the angles of the walls. The centre was a pool of water, and the further side, shrouded in darkness, might have led

into endless regions: they were beyond our reach: we had had enough of wading at another's expense. In the very middle of the pool there was sure to be an uncomfortable stagger and a dead pause, and the next movement might mean safety and dry land, or a plunge head over heels into an icy cold bath. Now; given, a cold bath: found, an attack of acute rheumatism.

Suddenly, as we looked, an almost imperceptible shadow—a sort of sensation such as is supposed to take possession of one at the approach of a ghost, fell upon us, and the next moment a syren's voice—surely that of a mermaid—was gently asking a question. We turned, and found the lady beside us. How had she crossed the deep, deep pool? Had she wings? or was she in truth a mermaid? or was she a spiritualist, and had the spirits wafted her through the air? We were in a lovely and mysterious cave, full of wonders that were almost miracles; magic might well exist here, fairies dwell in those sponges and corallines; a slight sound or murmur as of delicate and distant music filled the air with vibrations, in contrast with the louder murmur of the open sea. But our fair visitant looked so practical and earthly that we could only suppose she had boldly taken the water. We admired and wondered, but she had her reward in the beauty of the cave. We returned and left her apparently romantically spellbound at what she saw. In reality we believed she must be prosaically shivering with wet legs, half paralysed with cold; her rapt reverie nothing but a speculation as to how far we were capable of taking a mean advantage, by waiting on the other side the pool to have our curiosity satisfied and the mystery solved.

We departed religiously, it need not be said, and commenced struggling back to the higher level, though not quite by the way we had come down. Presently the lady—mermaid, spiritualist, something, at any rate, supernatural—issued from the cave without sign of water or ruffled plumage, and also commenced her upward climb, though not varying her route, and therefore not following in our wake. The guide looked after her with evident admiration for her determined courage. "That lady cannot be dhry," he exclaimed at last in his quaint English, and in a tone full of humour; as if he, too, wondering how the feat had been accomplished, had finally rejected all idea of miracle and magic.

Nothing could be more delightful than these scrambles amongst the rocks of Sark. The whole island is guarded by these mighty bulwarks. Day after day our guide disclosed their secret recesses, the hidden caves, the cunning ways by which we might explore the rocks and cliffs. Every now and then we seemed in positive danger, poised upon a point of over-hanging rock, and rescued only by the strong arm of de Carteret, who jumped and climbed from point to point, as sure-footed as a coney, and as swift and safe as a seagull. Whether from above or below, the view was ever magnificent; the sea for ever surrounded us, wild, restless and turbulent.

One of the marvels of Sark is the Creux Terrible. The word is more properly written *Derrible*; but the former so exactly answers to the description that it is well to adopt it. It was found one day, after long hunting, this time without any guide. We had strolled over the heathery moorland to the edge of the cliffs, wondering where this Creux Terrible could be. At length we gave it up, and then—as so often in life, in graver matters—it came to us. Round by a short path, concealed by a rising bit of land, we discovered the Creux, with so little warning that, unguarded or preoccupied, one might almost fall into the yawning pit.

Imagine a great round hole, reaching from the top of the cliff right down to the shore, about two hundred feet deep and thirty feet



THE COUPÉE.

wide. The sides are perpendicular. If you fall over, you will probably touch nothing till you reach the bottom. It was impossible to look into it without shuddering, for its mouth is unprotected, and you must either bend over the tremendous hole, or lie flat upon the ground to look into it. Either process was bad enough, and a very short gaze gratified one's curiosity and love for thrilling emotions. When the tide is high, the sea rushes through two openings into the Creux, and breaks and beats against the sides, and foams and froths like a seething cauldron.

But perhaps the most interesting part of the island is the Coupée, a long, narrow, uneven pathway that joins together Great and Little Sark. The path is now wide enough to allow a cart to pass, but years ago it is said to have been not more than a foot across. On either hand are sandy, rocky cliffs. One side is perpendicular and im-

passable ; the other almost looks so, but with a little courage and perseverance it is possible to get down to the shore. H. never could be brought to attempt it ; a plausible excuse was always at hand : gathering clouds, approaching rain, a violent wind, a rapidly advancing tide. Nevertheless it ought to be done, for in Sark there is nothing finer of its kind than this Coupée Bay, with its little beach, and gigantic rocks.

Once upon a time this downward path was much better than it is now. It must be confessed that it does look somewhat perilous. The first step seems to plant you upon a crumbling wall of perpendicular sand, whence, apparently, there is nothing to prevent you from performing a series of summersaults to the bottom, arriving there in



A SARK CAVE.

a state better imagined than described. But it is not so bad as this. Care and courage and a little surefootedness will land you in safety amongst the great pieces of rock that strew the shore, at the very edge of the inflowing tide.

The Coupée leads to Little Sark, which really seems more inhabited and less desolate than the larger portion of the island. En revanche, it is more waste and barren ; a quaint and curious bit of nature, very old-world in appearance, somewhat neglected and poverty-stricken. A handful of houses in irregular rows, forming a small cluster, more melancholy than Sark proper. The houses all looked like fishermen's cottages, purely and simply. The place reminded one rather of a Norwegian settlement, or the island of Marken, in the Zuyder Zee, without its costumes. The people stared curiously, almost as if our visit had been an intrusion, or we

a species unknown. It was all fancy on our part, of course, but even a second visit did not remove the impression. Here the rocks shelved gradually to the shore, but they were rough and slippery. Indeed there was no shore to repay one for the pains of descent, at any rate at high water; but the sea beat upon the rocks, which are singularly rugged and irregular, and in many parts covered with seaweed.

When we came to speak to the people, we found them civil and willing to talk, though shy and primitive. One cottage we entered was the pink of neatness, and proved a greater regard for interior than for mere outward appearance. The inhabitants of Great Sark have more pride; they attend to the one and do not neglect the other.

In that particular cottage a mother was playing with her baby; a comely mother and a cherub of an infant that would have delighted all other mothers' hearts. In an arm-chair in the chimney corner sat the grand-dame, old-looking beyond her years, no doubt, for she might have been a hundred. She had lost her teeth, was wrinkled and hoary, but her eyes were still bright, and there were the remains of what must have been, once upon a time, also a goodly and a comely woman.

Ah, that once upon a time! how one longs sometimes to put back into the past! I know not which is sadder, the Might have been or the Has been. It is, indeed, all sad; life is made up of it; moments of sunshine for days of gloom; hours of rapture and romance hidden away in the secret recesses of the heart, that fortunately tinge with their recollection the after years of reality, and make them endurable; the years when romance is dead, and our early skies, flushed with sunlight and rosy clouds and the deep blue of heaven, have turned to sombre grey, and life's stream is drifting, drifting towards infinitude, the ocean of eternity. And then, oh merciful thought, it will all return; the romance and the youth and the beauty and the love, only this time without sting and without alloy. No thorn to our roses, no pain to our pleasures, no sin to our souls.

Never once during our stay in Sark were we able to accomplish a much-desired end—that of sailing round the island. Only by this means could a true idea of the forms, the height, the grandeur of the cliffs be obtained. To wind in and out of the bays and irregularities, under the very shadow of its rocks, is the only way to gain a true impression of any coast. It then passes before the sight as a moving panorama, and the effect is never forgotten. But day after day the winds blew and the waves beat upon the shore, and ceased not, and we found it impossible to venture upon the water. Time after time we consulted our guide, always with the same result—it could not be done.

One morning we heard that a steamer was coming over unexpectedly from Guernsey. She would return in the afternoon, and no other would visit Sark this year. The weather was so boisterous and

unsettled that it almost seemed as if this opportunity of leaving ought not to be missed. "A proposal to let it pass, and take our chance of getting back some fine day as we had come, was cheerfully responded to by H. But at the same time he turned so pale, and looked so melancholy, that he evidently was sacrificing himself on the altar of friendship. His lips told one story, his looks another. It was not to be thought of, and we decided to make use of the occasion.

Impossible would it be to describe the sorrow and reluctance with which I made up my mind to leave Sark. The little island takes strange hold upon the affections: a power deep and lasting. Almost it seemed like bidding a long farewell to a dear, familiar friend, whose face, it may be, we shall look upon no more. Therefore that last day, and each visit to haunts now grown familiar, was coloured with a sadness it never had before. The miller became quite a romantic personage, even the surly cobbler almost a hero.

The steamer came in due course, and sounded only too surely our departing knell. The skies were not very sunny, or the seas smooth, and yet a few excursionists, the last remnant of the Philistines, had ventured over. We had no right to feel, nevertheless we did feel, their presence an intrusion which took from the loneliness of our calm retreats and much-loved solitudes. With those inevitable baskets and their inevitable contents, they put to flight all the romance and individuality which lingers about Sark to so great a degree.

At the post office we found a small crowd collected. It is nothing more than a cottage, primitive and unofficial, and the letters are given out as people come for them. This morning was quite a large mail-day; a whole week's collection, which means, even in a small island, a certain accumulation of letters and papers. The cottage was full, and overflowed, and it was amusing to watch one after another departing, gratified or disappointed, according to results. We had never seen so many people in Sark, never met them in our walks, and it remained a mystery what they did with themselves, and how they passed the time.

It was a greater mystery still, when, that afternoon, we found a yet larger crowd assembled on the little pier. We had said farewell to the island, the comfortable inn, our indefatigable host; had wandered by the windmill, watched the restless sails for the last time, listened to their roar, said a few last words to the friendly miller. Never had the lane leading to the harbour, with its over-arching trees, looked so sadly picturesque. Then passing through the tunnel, there was the steamer rocking outside the breakwater, and boats passing to and fro with passengers and cargo.

We watched these preparations for departure with a mournful interest. And still the little crowd increased—and still they came. Surely all the island had turned out to see the departure of the last boat? Down straggled the tourists with empty baskets and limp appearance, as if too much walking and the showers that had fallen

during the day had taken all energy out of their frames, and all the starch out of their attire.

Besides these were many passengers. It was just as if Sark had been asleep during the whole of our sojourn, and now had awakened only in time to get up and depart. In our constant and daily rambles we had seen none of them. And they were not even like the owls who come out at night, for by night we had been as deliciously lonely as by day. Their appearance, too, was amazing. We had found nothing but primitive people; fishermen and quiet working women, who trundled wheelbarrows, and gathered blackberries, and knitted stockings. And behold, here ladies and gentlemen in costumes that might have adorned Piccadilly and not disgraced the reputation of Madame Elise. Conventional handshakes were going on; polite parting regrets; ladylike fears at getting into the small boats, and appeals for protection if there happened to be a gentlemanly response at hand.

Such a string of vehicles, too, one never saw. It was very evident that Sark rouses up only on such occasions, and in the intervals falls into torpid repose. One after another they passed through the tunnel, lumbered over the bridge, and stopped at the end of the breakwater, a procession, singular enough even for out-of-the-world Sark. Gradually everything and everybody found its way on board, the last boat-load was disposed of, the hour had struck, away went the steamer. Sark for us was over. Its grand rocks and cliffs were receding, fading, vanishing. We were tossing and rolling on a rough sea. Some clung to the sides, some disappeared, everyone tried to look happy and comfortable, and very few succeeded.

One at least on board the little steamer was departing in silence and sorrow. More than ever did Sark, now an experience of the past, rise up in the memory and in the heart as a spot full of quiet beauty and untold attractions; round which a glorious sea for ever surges, chanting its praises in mighty tones, guarding it, sometimes only too well, from fear of evil. You may listen for ever to the beating of the waves upon the shore; you may watch them break and foam around those glorious cliffs and rocks, that possess a majesty and a power only equalled by the sea itself. You may lie prone upon the heathery slopes, and let the bracing air fan your cheeks with a life-giving caress; you may bask in the glowing sunshine, and watch the white clouds passing over the face of the deep blue sky. Hour after hour no human being will intrude upon your solitude or disturb your dreams. All is peace, loveliness and repose; perfect, inexpressible contentment. For Sark, by its charm, has steeped you in the waters of Lethe, and the spell is broken only by departure.

And we, in the little steamer, are tossing in the midst of the sea, our dream ended, bound once more for Guernsey.

A PURSE OF GOLD.

"IS it all right, Miss Waterware?"

"Quite, thank you—thank you very much," replied Rhoda, counting the little pile of golden sovereigns, and placing them with trembling fingers in an old purse, empty before, which she returned to the depths of her pocket.

"In six weeks' time, then, Miss Waterware—five weeks from next Monday."

"Oh, yes, I shall not forget; I shall be sure to be punctual," said Rhoda, looking at the principal with a bright smile. "I am *very* much obliged to you, Mrs. Bent."

Mrs. Bent smiled back again. She liked this young teacher of hers much; she liked the fair, pretty face, the pleasing manners, always gentle and ladylike, the cheerful, patient temper. "I hope you will be able to take a little holiday yourself, my dear," she said. "You should go somewhere for a change, if only for a week or two."

"I should like to, very much. I don't know what papa and mamma will say: but, with all this money, I think we can go somewhere," added the girl. "Good-bye, dear madam; I hope you will enjoy your stay at the sea-side;—and I thank you once again."

She set off with the brisk step of elation towards her home, a roomy, old-fashioned farm-house on the outskirts of the little village, which was called Setley. She was only an out-door governess in Mrs. Bent's school, and she took this same walk morning and night.

Captain Waterware was very poor. Close upon his retirement from the army, when he was looking out all ways to see what he could find to do, to eke out his narrow income and bring up his flock of children, this small farm fell to him by the death of an uncle. He took up his abode in it, and turned farmer.

It was but genteel poverty, at the best. With all his exertions and his industry—and Captain Waterware did not disdain to work as hard as any of his men—he could not, somehow, make it "pay." His eldest son, John, a tall, well-grown, handsome young fellow of one-and-twenty, was on the farm also, hoping for better things some day; and, twelve months before this present time, Rhoda, then eighteen, had presented herself to Mrs. Bent, hearing that lady wanted a teacher. Tired of the straitened means at home, the want of ready money for pretty new hats and neck-ribbons, and also conscientiously wishing to do something towards her own support, Rhoda applied for the situation without consulting anybody. What Mrs. Bent wanted was a sort of general help to herself—to go in by day: to hear lessons, set plain work and teach it, grind the

multiplication-table into dunces, sometimes give the music lessons, to be altogether a Jack-of-all-trades. The pupils were young and few in number. Rhoda accepted the situation; she was to be there in time for breakfast every morning, and to return home at eight in the evening. The amount of salary she was not quite clear about; but thought Mrs. Bent had mentioned ten pounds, to be paid yearly, before the Midsummer holidays. And when, on this day we are writing of, Mrs. Bent put into her hands *twenty* pounds, it seemed to the girl like a shower of gold.

Her feet seemed hardly to touch the grass, for she took the field way this warm afternoon. "Twenty pounds!" she repeated to herself in excitement; "I wonder what I can spend it in? What a lot of things it will buy for all of us!"

She forgot how *hardly* she had earned it; all things looked couleur de rose. She thought not of the weary toiling and teaching, or of the cold walks in the dark mornings and the darker nights, when the snow lay on the ground, and the sharp wind buffeted her, and the bitter frost struck her face. That was winter; this was summer—in more senses than one. It is well that the one should replace the other.

Her straw hat taken off and hanging on her arm, Rhoda passed gleefully on, leaving the cares of this wicked world behind her. A nearly six weeks' holiday, and twenty pounds to spend in it!

She seemed to tread on roses. Roses were in her cheeks, rosy were her lips, and she stopped a moment to pluck a cluster of wild roses from the hedge to toy with. Pink and white flowers nestled at her feet, starry ferns lay ready to her hand, green leaves rustled in the summer breeze. Drooping elm trees and shading oaks held their arms above her; blue forget-me-nots peeped out at her as she passed; and the yellow light of the afternoon sun glinted through the foliage to gild her pale brown hair.

"How sweet everything is!" she cried, dancing along. And who, to see her, would have supposed her to be Mrs. Bent's staid teacher, that sat in church with the little girls to keep order on a Sunday? "And I have a lover, and he loves me dearly," she softly whispered to her own heart. "And I wonder what he will say to all this money? Twenty pounds to do what I choose with! Twenty golden sovereigns! All my own—mine! I could throw them in the fire if I liked; I could change them into notes, and make spills to light papa's pipe with." And what a glad laugh she gave!

"Go out for a holiday, said dear Mrs. Bent to me; and how good she is, when I have often thought her stern and cross! Ah, if I could take one! The world is before me where to choose and go—if only I *could* choose and go—as other girls go whose people are richer than we are! I can wear my best frock every day now if I like, and buy new ones; I could buy new hats for Dolly and Kate; I could buy a new silk for mamma; I could go off to some charming

watering-place, and mix with all the fashionable people. Oh, what could one not do with twenty pounds! I will consult with mamma; I'll ask Dolly."

The clock was striking five when she reached home, and they were going to tea. Rhoda poured out the gold on the table. Her brothers and sisters flocked around with eager faces, not presuming to touch, Rhoda's the most eagerly excited face of all. She had never seen so much gold in one heap in all her life, still less possessed it.

"What can I do with it all, mamma?"

"Put it in the bank," interposed Captain Waterware. "I will place it there, Rhoda, in your name; it will be a pretty little nest-egg for you."

Rhoda's face fell. "Oh, papa!"

"That would not be enjoying it," smiled Mrs. Waterware, a plain, quiet, patient woman. "I expect Rhoda wants to experience the felicity of spending it."

"I have worked so hard for it," pleaded poor Rhoda.

"Suppose you buy a new carpet for the best parlour, Rhoda; the old one *is* so shabby," suggested little Kate. "A beautiful green ground, with roses and lilies on it."

"And a blue-and-red border round it," added John, quite gravely.

"O, yes!" said Kate, taking it in; "and, John, she might buy you a new gold watch and chain. You called your old silver one a turnip, yesterday, you know!"

"Buy a new croquet-set, Rhoda," cried one of the little boys. "Is it all *real* gold?" bending closer to the glittering heap.

"Couldn't you buy me a writing-desk, Rhoda?" whispered Dolly.

"Couldn't you buy us the sun, moon, and stars, Rhoda?" asked steady Stephen, who was hoping to get to college some time, and thence into the Church.

"Be quiet, you children," said Captain Waterware. "As Rhoda says, she has worked hard for the money, and it shall be spent upon herself—if it is spent at all."

The mother nodded approvingly. "To begin with, my dear, you must have a new silk dress. It had better be black: that does for all occasions."

"I do want one rather badly," admitted Rhoda.

"You want other things badly also, child. Suppose you put down a list?"

Rhoda was about to act on Mrs. Waterware's suggestion there and then. She put her hand in her pocket for her pencil, and drew out a small paper parcel.

"Oh, how ungrateful I am! I forgot all about it!" she cried. "Look here! The girls gave it me to-day."

It was but a little matter. A pretty pocket pincushion that the

school girls had made for her. On one side of the cardboard was a really well-painted little landscape; on the other, the words, "To our dear teacher, Miss Rhoda Waterware." The narrow, blue-ribboned rim between was stuck full of pins.

"Was it not kind of them?" said Rhoda, who had a loving, grateful nature.

Upstairs in her room that night, Dolly already in bed and asleep, she sat down to make out the list of the new things she needed. In truth it was rather an extensive one.

"Let me see," began Rhoda, drawing the candle towards her; and there she paused, and bit at the top of her lead pencil—the stump of a pencil that she used in the school.

"A black silk dress," she wrote at the head of the page. "And a new hat—I *must* have that. I *want* a new bonnet for Sundays, but —"

The pencil needed sharpening. She drew out her little pearl-handled knife, and it made her think of the giver.

"I wonder why Hugh gave me this?" she thought. "I told him at the time it was not lucky—that tradition says when we give a knife to any friend it cuts love in two. Hugh laughed in that quiet manner of his, and said he would risk it as far as *his* love went, and he trusted he could as regarded mine. Heigho!—if Hugh were but rich!—or if —" Rhoda paused.

"I don't think I'll make out the list to-night. I want so many things—and what pleasure will the things give me, only that they are needed—when I am not going out in the world to show them?"

"It looks almost like a special interposition of Providence, Sophia," said Miss Betsy Oatridge (her cousin) to Mrs. Waterware, "that I came over to see you, before starting on my journey. It will be the very thing for Rhoda, and I'll take her with me."

"But your sister may not care to see her, Betsy?" debated Mrs. Waterware. "She may have her house full; the Landors keep a great deal of company, and Rhoda has never been invited there."

"Fiddlesticks!" retorted Miss Betsy. "I invite her; that's quite enough. I should like to see my sister Susan not making room for anybody I choose to bring. This is Friday. I did think of starting on Monday morning next, but I'll put it off till Thursday, which will give Rhoda time for her preparations. She must go properly rigged-out *there*, you know."

"I'm afraid of the expense," sighed Mrs. Waterware.

"Afraid of the expense!" echoed strong-minded Miss Betsy. "What do you mean by that, Sophia? Has not the girl earned twenty pounds by dint of labour? And would you grudge her the benefit of it!"

"A few new things she must inevitably have if she stays at home; but, to make a proper appearance for some weeks' visit, at such a

house as Mrs. Landor's, would take the whole of it; and I do not think we should be justified in allowing it all to be spent!"

"You grub on here, in this old farm-house, among your boys and girls, Sophia, until you lose common sense," retorted Miss Betsy. "The girl was born to better things than she encounters now, and she ought to have a chance of finding them."

"But ——"

"Do hear me. You can't spend her money better than in fitting her out, so far as it will go, as the daughter of the once-fashionable Captain Waterware. I will pay her journey to and fro, and supply her with pocket-money. I can't do more than that."

"You are very good, Betsy ——"

"Not at all," interrupted Miss Betsy. "I shall be repaid in her companionship. Who knows what may come of this chance, Sophia? A pretty girl, and in good society. She may bring home a husband, for all you know!"

"But she is engaged, Betsy."

"Who is engaged?"

"Rhoda."

"*Engaged*—at nineteen! Did you engage her in her cradle?" angrily went on Miss Betsy. "Who is she engaged to?"

"To Hugh Gervase."

"What! the village doctor?—that dark little shrimp of a man!" screamed Miss Betsy.

"The little dark man is the uncle, Dr. Gervase. Hugh is with him—only an assistant at present. He is a very fine, nice-looking, sensible young man."

Miss Betsy Oatridge turned up her magnificent nose. "A village doctor's assistant, indeed! Just like you, Sophia! But I don't suppose you need trouble yourselves much more about *him*. Let the girl go out a bit into the world."

And poor, meek Mrs. Waterware, ever accustomed to yield to self-asserting Miss Betsy, had not the courage to do anything else now. Captain Waterware rather approved of the plan. Not so Rhoda.

"*All* the money to be spent upon me!—none upon anybody else, not even mamma or Dolly!" she remonstrated. "I should not like that at all, Aunt Betsy."

Aunt Betsy threw back her bonnet-strings: she had been talking too much to spare time to take it off. "Do you know your church-catechism, Rhoda?"

"I ought to," said Rhoda. "I have to hear every girl in the school say it once a week."

"Then you'll be good enough to call to mind, miss, that young people are there enjoined to obey their pastors and masters. And now hold your tongue."

Carrying all before her by dint of her strong will, Miss Betsy, that self-same day, carried off Rhoda.

"Give me the twenty pounds, and I'll lay it out upon her as far as it will go," she said to them. "I know what's what better than you do now, and what things she'll most want."

Hugh Gervase only caught a glimpse of her as she was getting into Miss Betsy's hired fly in the afternoon, to be conveyed to the railway station three miles off. He was passing accidentally.

"You'll not forget me, Rhoda," he whispered, when Miss Betsy, in answer to his questions, informed him in a cold, stand-off manner, that she was taking her young relative home to prepare her for a fashionable visit of some weeks. And the fly drove off, leaving the young doctor spell-bound.

II.

TIME and tide wait for no man. And though the black silk dress took some time to choose and make, and other essentials took time to choose and make, by dint of Miss Betsy's energetic endeavours and enjoiners, all things were completed by the Thursday morning.

While the dew was still on the grass, while the birds were holding their matin songs, while the sweet flowers were opening their petals to the coming day, they set off to catch an early train. Miss Betsy liked to be in good time for everything. Rhoda was happy as the singing birds, and building up air-castles.

It was a long journey. Not until the afternoon did they reach Arkleigh, the place where the Landors lived. Miss Betsy was pushing about amid the crowd at the station, and Rhoda stood on the platform a little bewildered, when she was suddenly accosted in a most astounding manner. "My dear Caroline, *you* here!" exclaimed a young man; and bending close down, kissed her on both cheeks.

Shrinking back, too much startled to speak, and glancing up to see whether the assailant might be a madman escaped from his keepers, she saw a tall, strong, gentlemanly young fellow, with a plain and merry countenance that was just then laughing all over.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times," said he. "I thought it was my sister Caroline, I did, indeed—we *are* expecting her to-day."

But here he found his ribs nearly stove in by the furious assaults of Miss Betsy's parasol.

"You thought nothing of the kind, James Landor," she exclaimed; "you know you didn't. It was just one of your impudent tricks. — Rhoda, my dear, this is the eldest son; and a nice respectable eldest son he is showing himself to be!"

"Don't give me a worse character than I deserve, Aunt Betsy," was the laughing answer. "It was indeed an inadvertent mistake—this platform's dark—and I hope Miss Waterware will forgive me—for this, I conclude, is she. My mother sent me here to meet you and the young lady, aunt, and the carriage is outside."

"Then we'll go on in it. And you just see after the luggage,

James Landor, and bring it home in a fly. Five boxes and three hand parcels, all plainly directed in my name."

That was how Rhoda's visit was inaugurated. She soon *forgave* James. *He* was a good-hearted, merry-natured, happy young fellow of one-and-twenty. Distant cousins by kin, they became intimate as brother and sister. The Landors were gay, happy people; they lived in good style, and saw much company. Rhoda had never before been so happy, so free from care.

Miss Betsy Oatridge, too strong-minded to be reticent, told her sister the story of the twenty pounds, and how it had been spent in decorating Rhoda for the visit. James, who was present and heard the account, laughed immoderately—especially at his aunt's winding up her narrative by saying Rhoda had looked upon herself as an heiress after that pile of gold was put into her hands.

"Miss Waterware the heiress!" commented he. "We'll introduce you here by that title, Rhoda, and have some fun. Mind you don't spoil sport by denying it; and please mind *you* don't, Aunt Betsy."

They paid no attention to his joking words, none at all, forgot all about it, in fact. Yet, strange to say, in some inexplicable way, the news did get about Arkleigh that Miss Waterware was a great heiress.

She and her friends were unconscious of this: people did not call her "heiress" to her face.

"Have you seen the new heiress?" was the question asked all over Arkleigh—at the breakfast-table, at luncheon-parties, at afternoon teas, at croquet meetings; above all, at the men's clubs. "Who is she when she's at home? How much is she worth? Some remote cousin of the Landors, is she not?"

"Came here under the wing of a queer old party, one Betsy Oatridge. *She's* well off, they say; but she's a regular guy, and wears spectacles."

"But what is the amount of the heiress's fortune?"

"Don't know. Fifty thousand, somebody said. Been living in seclusion with an old father, one Captain Waterware—retired."

"Money all her own?"

"Believe so. A nice little pull for some lucky fellow, fifty thousand pounds!"

And when Mr. James Landor could be caught at the club, and slyly questioned he protested, as well as he could for laughing, that he didn't know the precise amount of the heiress's wealth: Miss Betsy, a close old girl, would not tell him anything about it.

All the idle and fashionable young men went running to the Landors'. Mrs. Landor innocently wondered why they had become so attentive all on a sudden; Miss Betsy, priding herself as usual on her common sense, told herself why without the trouble of guessing: they were all taken with Rhoda's fresh and charming face. And she

looked upon it that the girl was as good as married to one of these rich and desirable men.

Perhaps all of them were not so rich (or so desirable either) as they appeared on the surface. Miss Betsy's eyes were but inexperienced eyes, after all, counting the spectacles in, and she was single-minded enough, as the world goes.

The two swains most persistent in their admiration, and who indeed soon distanced others, were men of the world, plausible in manner, stylish in appearance. Captain Wynne was the son of old Colonel Wynne, and supposed to be very well off. Mr. Lacy had come into a good fortune when he was of age. He was thirty now, and the money was all run through. Captain Wynne never had much to run through, and never would have, if the truth were known. To both of these gentlemen it seemed that a pretty girl and fifty thousand pounds would transform them into celestial mortals, more blessed than gods.

They quite dodged one another. If Mr. Lacy made his appearance at Mrs. Landor's in the morning, in all the pomp and circumstance of affluent state—a thoroughbred horse, and a groom behind on another, to hold the thoroughbred while its master went in—Captain Wynne would be sure to come in the afternoon. Rhoda was regularly besieged; and not at all loth to be. The glamour of the new life was upon her. It was just like a novel to have hot-house flowers sent to her—sent to *her*! She revelled in her pretty new dresses: she lavishly put on expensive gloves. Life to her, just now, was a pleasant day-dream. How delightful it was to be young and happy and beloved! As to her two lovers, as James persisted in calling them, she could not decide which of the two she preferred. Mr. Lacy was the most intellectual; Rupert Wynne the gayest.

The one, Lacy, sang with her in Italian, and quoted French poetry so rapidly as to confuse her: she could not always distinguish one word from another. "He means it to be complimentary, I'm sure," thought Rhoda; "but, if it were not for his eyes, I could not tell whether he is abusing me or praising me." While Captain Wynne walked by her side in the garden, plucking the sweetest flowers to offer her, and telling the ordinary news of the place in the tenderest of voices.

Strange to say, these two lovers were good friends. That is, they played cards together, and rode and drank in company. They had been introduced to the young lady at the same time; and they were content to try for her openly, each taking honestly his own chance of success—only asking "a fair field and no favour."

Thus three weeks of Aunt Betsy's visit passed away, and the fourth was entered upon. In this last week a picnic was projected to some mountains that lay at a distance, and a large party organised for it. The morning rose all lovely, and the party, after an early breakfast, began to assemble at Mrs. Landor's.

The night before, Rhoda's two lovers had been sitting together at their club, over cigars and claret-cup, both of them unusually silent. Suddenly Mr. Lacy got up, threw away the stump of his cigar, and addressed his friend in these enigmatical words :

"Wynne, my boy, fair play has been the word with us, and we have both honourably kept to it. But I'm thinking that must change."

"As how, Lacy?"

"Time's getting on, and nothing is done: you are none the better, neither am I. We must push on faster. It's said she goes away next week."

"Each one of us set on, and do what he can to distance the other—eh? Is that to be it, Lacy?"

"I don't see what else is to be done. We have made the running for her, side by side, in open fairness; that can't go on for ever. So now for

"The good old rule, the simple plan—
That he shall take who has the power,
And he shall keep who can!"

Captain Wynne considered for a minute, and then gave an approving nod. He was agreeable.

"Candidly, Wynne, I can't afford to let the thing go on," answered Lacy; "I am too hard-up. And I tell you fairly, that I shall put my luck with her to the test to-morrow."

"All right, Lacy. I'll do the same on my own account. There's my hand on it, old friend; and the little heiress must either pay your debts or mine. Confound all debts, say I. Anyway, whether she chooses you, or whether she chooses me, we shan't quarrel. She's a dear little girl, and I shall be sorry to lose her—if I do lose her. But the next best thing to her having me, will be her having you, Lacy."

The morning sun shone in the blue sky, and the party assembled at Mrs. Landor's. All sorts of vehicles were in waiting: landaus, waggonettes, gigs. Captain Wynne and Mr. Lacy each dashed up in a stylish gig, each hoping for a certain young lady's company in it. But James Landor had a gig of his own, and had appropriated her.

"You will go with me, mind!" he said to Rhoda, with all the authority that he might have used had he been her brother.

"May I?" said the young lady, appealing to Mrs. Landor.

"Why, of course you may, my dear," was the answer; "you and James are cousins, you know; it will be quite en règle."

They drove off together. The scenery through which they had to pass was charming. Rhoda's heart beat high with happiness. It was worth all the school drudgery she had toiled through for twelve months to be enjoying life in this way. Well dressed, no care for the hour, driving in these enchanting, dim old roads, with this ever-

pleasant, ever-amusing cousin, who made so much of her. They had struck into a wild sort of place; the road wound in and out, round dark cliffs that towered aloft. Old pines darkened the air with their gloomy presence; brighter foliage reared its verdant masses. Old fallen trees, hoary and grim, shaggy with pendant mosses, lay about. A wild, gloomy bit of scenery altogether, but possessing its attractions. If a thought ever and anon crossed Rhoda's heart, that one whom she had learned to care for was not with her to enjoy things, why, she had compensations. By the side of these fashionable men, grand and rich and idle, who would look at a plain, hard-working village doctor?

"Here we are," cried James, driving steadily over a little rustic bridge into a wide, green, open space, that might be the abode of fairyland. Some of the party were there already, having taken the other road; more were coming up.

Everybody knows what a picnic is, with its unstilted intercourse, and its luncheon baskets. Not always a spot so appropriate as this is accessible for one. A mountain scramble is a delightful pastime when the atmosphere is clear, the sun shines on the joyous youths and maidens, and the air rings with their fresh young voices.

The first thing done was to spread the lunch *al fresco*. A cottage hard by, accustomed to these parties, supplied hot water, plates, knives and forks. All went merry as a marriage bell; and when the meal was over, its guests dispersed hither and thither at their own sweet will. Miss Betsy Oatridge, and a few more staid ones of her age and tastes, sat on chairs, borrowed from the cottage, in the shade. Miss Betsy wore a huge hat which flapped about on all sides; James Landor asked her, in the hearing of all the company, whether it had come out of Noah's Ark.

Oh, the monster rocks, that one might have fancied grim sentinels, guarding the entrances to the strongholds of giants! Oh, the picturesque glades; the purple blue-bells, the trailing arbutus, the fragrant wild thyme, the patches of blue forget-me-nots! With her hands full of these little flowers, Rhoda, scrambling up hill alone, stood a moment, with panting breath and sparkling eyes, to gaze at the grand panorama beginning to unroll itself to her view. A vast plain, like a wide ocean, lay spread out before her as a picture, its surface delicately showing alternately light grassy plains and dark woodlands, threaded with silver streamlets, and dotted with villages and farm-houses. Beyond, clustered hills, touching the verge of the horizon: you could not tell which were the mountain summits, which the light clouds. Rhoda, contemplating all this, lost in rapture, was speedily brought down from the clouds to earth by a voice beneath her.

"Oh, Miss Waterware! won't you wait for me? I am coming when I can find the proper turn. Dear, dear Rhoda, will you not tell me that there's hope for me? If you care for me in the least degree, throw me down one of those sweet blue flowers."

How Rhoda had attained her present vantage-ground—a small grassy shelf, quite out of the direct way—she would have been puzzled to tell. She looked more than pretty standing there, in her delicate summer costume, the white straw hat shading her pretty face and its clear, innocent hazel eyes. Captain Wynne's ascending voice, and his petition, brought to the face a rose-red flush.

Voices and footsteps were heard rapidly approaching; some of the party had found the same way that she had, at any rate. Was it by accident, as she turned to look, that a small bunch of the blue forget-me-nots fell from her hand at Rupert Wynne's feet? As he returned her a sunny, grateful look, and raised them to his lips, the blush on her face deepened to a glowing crimson.

Of those approaching, Mr. Lacy reached her first. He bounded over a ledge of rock, and took his stand at her side. Rupert Wynne threw up to him a gay look of triumph.

"Excelsior is still our motto, Miss Waterware," cried Mr. Lacy:—

"——Non sotto l'ombra in spiaggia molle
Tra fonti e fior, tra Ninfe e tra Sirene,
Ma in cima all'erto e faticoso colle
Della virtù, reposto e il nostro bene."

What was there for Rhoda to do but blush again, and smile confusedly, for she did not understand a word of it.

"I thought I heard people with you," she said, as the steps and voices seemed to be dying away.

"They have gone up higher, I expect; I caught a glimpse of you here, and found my way. And I want you to go higher also," he added. "On the side of that steep crag yonder is a seat with a story—a real legendary tradition. Will you come?"

"But how is it possible to reach that overhanging crag?"

"It is easily accessible—taking the right way. Allow me to pilot you. You must give me your hand, Miss Waterware."

Seeing nothing else for it, she gave him her hand, and he struck into a narrow path that wound upwards.

"These mountain scrambles are generally like that celebrated feat of King George's," remarked Rhoda, "who marched up-hill with twice ten thousand men, and then marched down again."

On reaching the summit of that particular crag, Rhoda, hot, tired, and glad to have got safely up, willingly took the comfortable-looking seat, sculptured by nature on the edge of one side of it. It was called, Mr. Lacy told her, the Giant's Throne, and there was exactly room for two mortals to sit on it, as he observed, squeezing himself in beside her. Then he told her the legend, which, of course, had to do with two lovers, who sat there to plight their troth, ending with the words, "And they lived happy ever after."

"It is a pretty story," she said, uncomfortably conscious.

"But you have not yet heard the superstition connected with it.

It is that all lovers since that time, who plight their troth sitting in this self-same spot, are sure to lead lives of perfect felicity. Oh, Rhoda, dear Rhoda," he broke off in tones of passion, "will you not plight yours to me? I love you dearly. Nay, do not turn your head away. Give me the right to claim this dear little hand. Say one word, only one—that you will be mine."

Rhoda Waterware had never been in such a dilemma as this. There was Captain Wynne, and there was Hugh Gervase, and now here was Mr. Lacy! What on earth to answer, she could not think. But a sudden shouting arose to interrupt the confusion.

"Halloa! Take care, you two, there!" called out James Landor from below. "Rhoda, my dear, do you know that one false step, but a slight slip, would land you in Eternity? Don't *you* know the place, Lacy? That ledge of a seat overhangs a fearful precipice; it is concealed from your view by the thick growth of ivy. Bring her away, for heaven's sake!"

Startled to terror, Rhoda bent forward. She could see nothing—nothing, save the rocky earth at a vast depth below. Her head began to swim.

"Oh, Mr. Lacy, this is fearful," she cried, putting her hand unbidden into his. "Take me away; take me away! My head turns already."

"Say yes, first," he whispered in a low, entreating tone, clasping the hand within his own warmly. "Say you will accept me."

"Yes, oh, yes! I will say anything to be got away from this horrible spot," she answered, nearly beside herself with fright. "Is this the way? Oh, come! come!"

Cautiously and carefully he led her away, and beyond the reach of peril. Poor Rhoda, thoroughly unnerved, could hardly restrain her tears.

"How could you lead me into such danger, Mr. Lacy?"

"Landor and your own fears have given you an exaggerated view of it. There is no danger when ordinary caution is observed, and you were in none while I was at hand to guard you. Rhoda! you cannot suppose I would suffer you to encounter any?"

"It has given me a great fright," she said, with a half sob.

"Thanks to Landor. My love, you must forgive me. I wanted to hear you say the dear words there that you have said."

"But I—but you—you know, Mr. Lacy, I did not mean ——"

"I know what you said, my darling," he rejoined, interrupting her stammering excuse; "you cannot break a promise given on the Giant's Throne. Such a thing, even with the best wish, was never ventured on yet."

James Landor came in view, and stopped the confidences. The scramble down was even more fatiguing than the ascent had been. And when they came to another little natural plateau, abounding in mossy seats of rock, and just over a tiny streamlet that made the

echoes musical with the sound of falling waters, Rhoda at least was glad to rest. Here James Landor pitched into Lacy for his imprudence as hard as tongue could do it. Captain Wynne, who had come up, reproached his friend with silent looks, and a bevy of damsels screamed out that they'd not be taken to the Giant's Throne for all the diamonds ever polished.

Tea came next, in the fairy-land where they had dined; a pleasant tea, all nectar and ambrosia—or things that tasted as good. Sitting on the borders of a gurgling stream afterwards, many of them right glad of the rest, someone sang a song taken from Tennyson's "Brook," and the words were the fitting accompaniment to the delicious gurgling of the water:—

"I clatter over stony ways,
In little sharps and trebles,
I bubble into eddying bays;
I babble on the pebbles.

"I steal by lawns, and grassy plots,
I slide by hazel covers;
I move the blue forget-me-nots,
That bloom for happy lovers."

Captain Wynne looked at the withered flowers in his button-hole. Mr. Lacy looked proudly conscious at Rhoda. And Rhoda, blushing painfully, moved away from the spot. She wandered to a sheltered nook, where she fancied herself secure from interruption, and there sat down on the grass in a reflection that was very uncomfortable.

What could she do, she wondered. Here were the *two*. Two lovers! Which of them should she take? And if she took either, what of Mr. Gervase? "I wish I was a nun!" sighed Rhoda. "Nuns never run the risk of such troubles as these.—If I don't believe they are coming after me! They have found me out here. Yes, *both* of them!" She jumped up.

True enough: Captain Wynne and Mr. Lacy. But two of the girls were with them, which to Rhoda was a relief.

"Do see what I've just done!" cried one of the girls, piteously, to Rhoda, exhibiting a woeful rent in the skirt of her thin dress.

"It must be pinned up," said Rhoda.

"But we've not got any pins; neither of us has."

"I have; I'll do it for you," returned Rhoda, ever good-natured. And she dived into an inner pocket and produced a pincushion. It was the pincushion presented to her by the little school-girls, with the painted view on one side it, the inscription on the other.

Letting the pincushion fall on the ground, after taking some pins from it, she knelt down and busied her hands with the torn skirt. The other girl stood watching. Mr. Lacy, having nothing better to do, cast his eyes on the inscription in an idle, indifferent sort of way,

and read it to himself. Then, bending his head lower, as if to make sure he was not mistaken, he read it again.

With a breathless gasp, suppressed instantly, he quietly touched Captain Wynne's arm, pointing stealthily to the inscription. The latter then read it, and they looked at one another. At that moment James Landor ran up.

"Some more pins, please," said Rhoda to the young lady who was looking on. She stooped to pick up the pincushion, and handed out the pins needed, one by one.

It was her turn now to see the inscription; and she, not thinking any ill, repeated it aloud. "'To our dear teacher, Miss Rhoda Waterware.' That does not mean *you*, does it?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, it does," replied Rhoda, rising to regard the dress.

"But—surely you are not a governess?"

"Yes, I am."

"And not an heiress?"

"An heiress! I! Oh, dear, no!"

A dead silence. Rhoda saw the blank looks surrounding her, the consternation depicted on the faces of her two lovers, and she blushed painfully. But she was a right-minded girl, morally brave.

"We are a good many of us at home—children, I mean; and papa's income is very limited. It seemed to me that I, the eldest girl, ought to do something to help, if only for pocket-money; and for a year now I have gone by day to help Mrs. Bent in her school."

Still nobody spoke; the silence was not reassuring. Mr. James Landor disappeared round a projecting corner, and had to sway himself about to keep from bursting.

"Well, and it is very meritorious of you, Miss Waterware. I wish all of us whose families are poor had the courage to do the same!" spoke up the girl of the damaged skirt, as she heartily put her hand into Rhoda's. They turned away together; the other young lady followed. Young Landor emerged into view, rather purple: the two lovers received him with reproachful glances.

"How, in the name of mischief, could the report have arisen that she was a great heiress?" cried Lacy. "*You* must have heard it said, Landor, times and again. You ought to have contradicted it."

"I!" returned James, innocently. "My good fellow, you must have seen me laugh at it, often; it was just one of those absurd little reports that one makes fun of. If I took upon myself to contradict all the tattle that's afloat, I should have my hands full."

"Took us all completely in," observed Wynne, ruefully.

"A teacher in a school!—why, she's not even a lady!" foamed Lacy, in his desperate rage.

James Landor turned upon him. "A lady always; a gentlewoman of good birth and breeding, though she does teach. Captain Waterware can hold rank with you any day, my friend. Don't libel people, Lacy!"

Mr. Lacy drove Captain Wynne home in his gig, lending his own

gig to somebody else. Neither of them pressed for Miss Waterware's companionship on the road, as they had in the morning; and both got up a nice little plausible excuse to Mrs. Landor for not joining the rest of the company at her house that evening.

Rhoda returned home with James, as in coming. He guided his horse so strangely through losing himself in bursts of laughter that she threatened to get out of the gig.

"Those two fine fellows have been taking you for an heiress all the time, you see, Rhoda!"

"But *why* have they? And they seem quite to have turned against me now. How could such a report have got about?"

"Who is to know how improper reports get about," replied Mr. James, piously. "You won't be troubled by the two gentlemen much more, I fancy."

"You think they only cared to please me for my ideal money?"

"That's it, young lady. They'll both run away from you now, as the recreant knight did from the lady looking over the castle wall."

Rhoda fell to thinking. "James," she said, presently, in a half whisper, "it seems to me it has been but sorry pastime. Why did they try to make me like *them*, if they did not care for me?"

"They liked your reputed money, my dear."

"And—suppose—suppose they had made me care for them (for one of them, I mean, of course), with all my heart? A nice plight of sorrow I might be in now!"

"There was no fear of that, you know. Your heart was case-hardened."

"Case-hardened! How?"

"By your love for Gervase; your engagement to him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Rhoda, with hot cheeks, "who told you of that?"

"Aunt Betsy. It was her first private news to us when she entered the house. So I knew you were safe, cousin mine."

"Do you think it can be that those two gentlemen *want* money, James, that they should think so much of my being an heiress?"

"I think they both want it very badly."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Rhoda. "When they both make such an appearance—seem to be so rich and high and mighty!"

Mrs. Landor was somewhat surprised the following morning to receive a note from Captain Wynne *and* one from Mr. Lacy. Some friend of theirs had met with a dreadful accident, a hundred miles, or so, away; he was lying in imminent danger, and they were hastening to him. Hence they were unable to call on Mrs. Landor, apologised, and enclosed cards.

A few days more, and Miss Betsy Oatridge was sitting in the homeward train, Rhoda by her side. Rhoda was thoughtful, Miss Betsy cross.

The four weeks have passed like a dream," reflected the girl,

"and all my money's gone. My whole twelvemonth's earnings! It might have been better to buy the new carpet; or to let papa put it in the bank; or else spend it on mamma and Dolly. The dear boys asked me for a new cricket——"

"Well, it has been a nice failure!"

Miss Betsy's sharp-toned interruption startled Rhoda. "What has been a failure?" she asked.

"What! why the visit," said Aunt Betsy. "I intended it to have made your fortune. And why one of those two men did not propose to you, I cannot think; or both of them, for the matter of that."

"It has been a very nice visit, Aunt Betsy. Quite a new experience for me. I shall be all the better and brighter for it."

"It must have been your own fault in discouraging them; nothing else," grumbled Aunt Betsy. "You had got Hugh Gervase on your brain when you went, and I expect he's there still. I wish you joy of your school duties, Rhoda, and of him too."

Rhoda turned away her face and smiled softly. By the thrill of joy that ran through her at the sound of his name, at the thought that she was so soon to see him again, she knew that she had him indeed on her brain, and in her heart. The fairy glamour of fiction and fancy was over; truth and reality reigned again.

It was late that night when they reached Captain Waterware's. In the bustle of getting the luggage from the fly, all the Waterwares young and old, assisting, Hugh Gervase drew Rhoda aside for a moment under the star-lit laurels.

"Have you returned as you went, Rhoda—all mine?" he whispered.

"All yours, Hugh. Now and always."

"My darling! Well, I have news for you. My uncle has at last taken me into partnership. And so—and so—you know the rest."

She burst into tears. Of joy, not of pain. What sort of dismay would have been hers now had she been tempted to give up Hugh for either of those others?

"It is that I am glad to be back with you again," she said: and Hugh kissed the tears away.

"Rhoda!" screamed out Miss Betsy. "Rhoda! Now, where's that girl gone to? Rhoda, my best calf-leather bag is lost. You must have left it in the train."

"Here's the bag, Aunt Betsy," said Rhoda, coming forward, and holding out the bag in her hand.



JACOB'S CURSE.

THE new Rath of Gottingen sat in his leathern chair close to the stove. On a rude table at his elbow were assembled the little appliances necessary to his comfort, on the evening of this his first day of office—a huge jug of beer and an ample tobacco pouch. He wore an easy velvet coat, somewhat shabby, loose slippers covered with roses in carpet stitch, the work of some good Bertha or Matilda. A smoking-cap with a long tassel, hung down over a thoughtful, contemplative face—a face that should have belonged to a studious professor, rather than to a man whose calling led him into the busy walks of life.

Rath Marquardsen was a young man, little over thirty: his talent had raised him thus early to the honourable position he held in Gottingen. It seemed to him but yesterday that he was a student in the venerable university, taking notes of the lawyer's lectures in the great saal of the college, or strolling the streets arm in arm with his chosen comrade, the captain of the Prussian corps, their white and green caps stuck jauntily on their heads, and their great dogs following closely. The streets were as full of Prussians, red-capped Vandals, and yellow-crested Swabians as ever; they sang the old drinking-songs in their rich voices, bass and baritone and mellow tenor so sweet, that the Rath was fain to pause for a second in his administration of justice while the singers streamed past the windows of the court-house.

The books he used to study were piled in confusion on the floor of his parlour, where he had tossed them out of his trunk on the day of his arrival. He had neither wife nor sister to arrange them for him, so there they would in all probability remain. He was half minded to refresh himself with a little reading, but was too lazy to get up and fetch a book. Just then came a knock at his door. "Come in," called Rath Marquardsen, and the old clerk of the court-house entered, staggering under a pile of musty volumes.

"You bade me clean out the drawers, and bring you these old books to look over, Herr Rath," said the clerk. "Here they are, the records of justice in Gottingen for the last hundred years. Surely your worship won't be troubled to read this stupid stuff? Better let me throw it into the stove."

And he tossed the books upon the table with a gesture of disdain. But the Rath regarded them with very different eyes.

"Pray leave them there," cried he, spreading his hands over them as though to guard a treasure. "Ah, that will do. Wilt thou try my beer and tobacco?"

The clerk went away muttering: "When the Herr Rath has been as long about the courts as I, he will not care for law books out of business hours."

Antiquity had an immense charm for the Rath. The worm-eaten, calf-skin bindings, blackened edges of the leaves, and musty smell of the ancient books helped him to call up the vanished generations who had used them. They began to pass before the eye of his fancy in shadowy rows, reacting the tragic or tranquil scenes of their little day on earth. Therefore, the moment the clerk was gone, he drew the lamp near him, and began to turn over the yellow pages of the records.

They were not particularly exciting. Most of them were meagre notes of trials, compressed into as few words as possible; but at length, in examining the very oldest book of all, he came upon an entry which interested him so much that he read it over and over again. This page was headed, "Trial of Jacob Winterwerb for Forgery," and at the bottom of the leaf was pasted a sheet of crumpled letter paper, closely written in a curious, crabbed, but sufficiently legible hand.

Our bookworm pounced upon this ancient manuscript as a gold-digger might pounce upon a nugget, or a gourmet upon a chef d'œuvre of Soyer. Putting on his spectacles—for, like many Germans, he was troubled with weak eyes—he began to read the faded yellow writing:

"August 7th, 1751.—I have returned home after a long, tiring day in the court-house"—commenced the MS.—"but weary though I am, I cannot sleep: I cannot forget the events of this day. A strange gloom hangs over me. A fearful curse which was uttered in my hearing keeps obtruding itself upon my memory, and some power that I am totally unable to control or resist impels me to write it down. Yet surely it was enough that the recording angel should mark Jacob Winterwerb's imprecation: must his fellow-sinner record it too? As Rath of Gottingen, I have had to try my old neighbour Jacob for the dark crime of forgery. It was hard for me to try him, but the extreme hardness of my case is, that I still believe him to be guilty, although his countrymen have acquitted him.

"I have had more opportunity for observing his daily conduct than any other man in Gottingen, and what I have noticed makes me fear he has forsworn himself to-day. He would plead his own cause—he would defend himself. Yes! he was quite clever enough to do it well. We were boys together, Jacob and I, and wicked though he be, I bear him a kindness still; I cannot endure to let my mind dwell upon his eternal loss!

"I am impelled to write it down. Probably everyone else who was present in the court-house to-day has forgotten the extraordinary curse by which he bound himself, but the remembrance of it keeps me restless in spite of my fatigue. He said, raising his hand towards

heaven : ' If I am not speaking God's truth, may my body never turn to dust in the grave !'

"Poor Jacob ! hated by all but me, perhaps God of His mercy may yet lead you to repentance.

"I am safe enough in writing down what he said, because no mortal eye will read the lines I have now written until Jacob and I shall both have gone to our account. I shall leave the MS. sealed and directed to my son Franz ; he will do with it as he pleases.

"Jacob Winterwerb has lived in the house adjoining mine ever since his marriage, thirty years ago. Our gardens lie side by side, separated only by a low hedge. His eldest brother, Herman, was the richest merchant in Gottingen, which is saying something where all are wealthy.

"The brothers lived together until Herman's death, which took place two months ago. Their household consisted of the two old men and two lads, Peter, the only son of Jacob, and Güstel, the son of their poor sister Netta, who died young, leaving her little child to the care of his uncles. Poor Netta Winterwerb ! Ah, well, well ! I have ever taken a peculiar interest in her boy !

"My Franz and the two youths next door were schoolfellows and playfellows, just as Jacob, Herman and I used to be many years before. Netta's son was a good lad, honest, kindly, and generous : but Jacob's boy inherited his father's mean and selfish qualities, and these were fostered by the education he received.

"The rich uncle was an invalid for three years before his death. It was Güstel who tended him like the gentlest nurse, who wheeled his chair about the garden, who lighted his meerschau, or brought him his coffee, or rubbed his cramped limbs by the hour. Walking in my garden on these occasions, I often heard the sick man say : ' Good boy, you do not get tired of me ; you do not think me a burden ; but you shall be rewarded. I shall leave you every kreutzer I am worth in the world. You shall be the richest man in Gottingen.' And I used to see the lad's fine eyes grow dim as he stammered forth : ' Oh, my dear uncle, I do not want your money ; I take care of you because I love you—you are the only friend I have on earth.'

"'I know all that, Güstel, but you are to be my heir, remember that.'

"Then the father and son would enter the garden, and seeing the uncle and nephew conversing so lovingly, used to be distraught with anger. I then heard Jacob say to the young man :

"'See that sneaking hypocrite yonder, worming himself into your uncle's favour, in hopes of inheriting his wealth. Go you and rub his gouty foot, and fetch his coffee, and you may supplant Güstel yet. Go, I say, and speak him fair. No ? You are a lazy fool ! You had rather break lamps on the Anlage with the students, or drink beer till you are like a brute, than take a little trouble to make your fortune. If that detestable Güstel is your uncle's heir it will be your own fault.'

"And Jacob used to give his son an angry push towards the couple in the arbour.

"Peter tried hard to please his uncle, but he set about it in such an awkward manner, and got tired so soon, that he never made any progress in supplanting Güstel. Half an hour's conversation with the poor invalid was more than he could put up with, and he was glad to rush away at the first opportunity to the beer cellars, where the students spent their time in gambling and drinking. I knew the whole family history; how Güstel had been beaten and tyrannised over by Jacob and Peter when he received sweatmeats and toys from his uncle in his childish days; and how, now that he was too old to be beaten, they showed their hatred and jealousy quite as plainly, though in a different way.

"I saw more than I liked to see out of my window, or while walking in my garden, and Herman was wont to complain of Peter and praise Güstel to me—always ending with his intention of making the latter his heir.

"There was something very like murder in old Jacob's eyes when he saw his brother and nephew together. At such times I trembled for my neighbours, so rich, but so little at ease or content.

"At length Herman died. He had not been able to leave his room for some months before his death, and there Güstel had attended him with the greatest tenderness.

"The funeral was over, and the will read. What was our surprise to hear that it was made in favour of Peter, not of Güstel. I shall not linger over what is so well-known to every townsman of Gottingen. No need to tell how the universal suspicion of foul play gained ground, or how suspicious circumstances came cropping up by degrees, until at last Jacob Winterwerb stood his trial on the charge of having erased the name of Güstel and inserted that of Peter, and has been acquitted. In the sight of man he is now virtually spotless: how stands he in the sight of God? It is this question that troubles me, for I cannot believe him innocent, knowing all I know; yet if guilty, how came Matheus and Folkshausen to swear that they witnessed the drawing out and signing of the will. Can Jacob have bribed them to perjure themselves also? If so, a crushing weight of guilt hangs over him. That was an awful speech: 'If I am not swearing God's truth, may my body never moulder in the grave.' I might indeed have damaged his cause, but I was the Rath, not one of the witnesses."

The next entry was dated two years later.

"1753. It is almost two years and three months since the trial. Jacob Winterwerb's first act on gaining possession of Herman's wealth, was to turn his nephew out of doors. Nothing was heard of the unfortunate youth until six months afterwards, when he came to my dwelling late one night, worn to a shadow. His clothes were threadbare, but the saddest change was in his pinched, sunken face—

the once handsome face that his Uncle Herman had so loved and admired.

"He had been living in a miserable garret upon the pocket-money he had saved during his prosperity, and the sale of his uncle's various gifts; but this store was spent to the last kreutzer, and for the last two days he had been starving. Another year, he said, would see him through the university, and fit him for a profession, and he implored me to give him some copying to do, or assist him in some other way to make a little money. Do it, he urged, for my Uncle Herman's sake! I was, indeed, most willing to befriend him for the sake of my Netta, his mother, my own early love. So he came to live with us, and he and Franz attended lectures together. Jacob never forgave me for harbouring the lad whom he hated, as bad men will always hate the injured; he had kept up a semblance of neighbourliness till then, but at that period our final rupture took place. Güstel got on well: he is now a Pfarrer in Ziegelhausen, useful and respected.

"Jacob's strange curse is haunting me to-day. I have only just returned from his funeral, and ere I sleep must conclude this memoir. Perhaps when the last word is written I may be able to forget.

"Jacob's end came very suddenly. I fear me his son was no gentle nurse during the one week of his illness.

"A vast concourse of his townsmen helped to lay Jacob in his grave beneath the row of yew-trees called the Seven Sisters, in our cemetery outside the Friedrich's Thor. It is there the rich men of Gottingen all lie, each in his narrow house, underneath his marble monument.

"The tallest yew has Jacob's tomb in shadow. There stands the hoary sister, gaunt and grim, stretching her black arms over the white urn, whereon she sheds her crimson berries in autumn, staining the marble like drops of blood, and weeping icy tears the winter through, which gradually wash out the stains.

"Oh, Jacob, Jacob! is that marble urn and your gorgeous coffin all that is left to you of your wealth? Farewell: I am not your judge. You have entered the presence of a higher Judge, into whose hands we must all fall at last."

"Du lieber Himmel!" muttered Rath Marquardsen, fingering the yellow manuscript tenderly: "this man should have been a preacher: he was thrown away upon the magistracy."

There was a note at the foot of the page in a different handwriting, to the effect that Franz Folkshausen had found the above among his late father's papers, and had placed it with the annals of the courthouse for the year 1753.

Rath Marquardsen sat meditating beside his stove, but his delight with the MS. was fast changing into a creeping, grisly terror, such as he had never experienced in all his life before. Jacob's strange curse

had taken full possession of his imagination, and he was afraid to look up lest he should see the old man's covetous, cruel eyes fixed upon him. He had a horrible idea that if he turned round he might find him at his elbow, or peeping at him from behind the window-curtain, which was certainly moving slightly.

In his unreasoning trepidation the Rath got up and made an undignified retreat into his bed-room, looking behind him at every step. He tumbled into bed after but short toilet operations, feeling safe only when he drew the eider-down plumeau over his head.

But wicked old Jacob followed him there, and tormented him all night in dreams. He dreamt that he proceeded to the cemetery at Friedrich's Thor, got the sexton to open the grave, and found Jacob's body undecayed in its velvet coffin; that it opened its eyes when the light reached it, and springing up, clutched him by the throat. He awoke trembling, with cold drops of perspiration standing on his face. Falling asleep again, the same vivid dream awakened him.

Strange to say, the impression did not wear off, like most hallucinations, with the daylight; but Jacob's history haunted him all the time he was busy in the court-house. So instead of going home to dinner, he went to his friend and crony, Professor von Schenk, of the College Museum, and showed him his treasure trove, the yellow MS.

A very long discussion between these two erudite men of Göttingen ended in their taking their hats, and setting out arm-in-arm for the cemetery. Marquardsen led his friend past the forest of little black crosses where the peasants lay, to the broad alley where reposed the great and noble, a stately assembly of broken columns, snowy urns, and tall monuments. The tombs of those lately dead were known ere you came close enough to read the date of their inscriptions, by the fresh wreaths of everlastings, which dear, loving hands had hung there last All Souls' Day, and by the bright gardens that flourished over their inmates' quiet breasts.

The name of Winterwerb was well-nigh forgotten in Göttingen, so that the Rath did not dream of searching among these for Jacob's grave. He hurried on to where the seven old yew trees stood in hoary array, and there, sure enough, was the beautiful marble urn, no longer white, but grey and venerable after the lapse of a century. "Here it is!" cried Rath Marquardsen, in a hoarse tone, that almost startled himself. "'Jacob Winterwerb, who departed this life June 23, 1753, deeply respected and regretted.'"

"Stay you there," said the business-like professor, "while I summon the sexton."

"Not I," said our friend, trying to conceal a shudder; "I shall accompany you."

The day was far advanced before the sexton and his assistants had removed the urn, and dug away the earth from the coffin-lid. Several people, attracted by what was going on, came hurrying up just as the

coffin was raised and laid upon a flat tombstone. Rath Marquardsen shivered, and would fain have retreated, but shame kept him on the spot. He was not prepared for the sight that met his eyes when the lid was raised. The professor rubbed his spectacles, and bent over the coffin calmly speculative, as he was wont to inspect a new curiosity in the museum.

He lifted the folds of the shroud, which, to his intense amazement, was white and spotless as it was on the day of Jacob's funeral, and beneath lay the body undecayed, after a hundred years' sojourn in the tomb. The Rath gave one trembling glance and turned away hastily, seized with a sudden fit of shivering, while the spectators, pressing round the coffin, shouted with horror and wonder. Meanwhile, the professor coolly proceeded with his examination. He raised the long grey locks that rested on the velvet pillow, and stroked the parchment-like cheeks. "We must have this fellow in the museum!" cried he, delightedly; "a perfect mummy, preserved by miracle. I shall write off to Heidelberg and Munich, and get Schulze and Heine here to examine it, and then I shall prepare a paper for the *Alterthümer Blatt*."

"No, no, Von Schenk. Put him back in his grave; I shall never forgive myself for this desecration of the tomb. I wish I had not read that confounded MS., then I should not have had that wild dream, nor have brought you here to disturb the dead. Replace him, I pray you."

"I shall place him, not replace him. He shall stand between our Theban mummy and our Mastodon giganteus, in the left-hand corner of the great museum saal. My dear sentimentalist, the responsibility rests upon the University of Gottingen, not on you. Pray set your mind at ease."

The Rath turned away in real misery, and walked home, pursued by the voice of Von Schenk, who called after him to enquire whether he were willing to resign all claim to the mummy, which was his property by right of discovery. It was a long time before he prevailed upon himself to visit the museum. At length some ladies begged him to take them over the college, and he could hardly refuse. Old Jacob was leaning against the wall in his corner between the geological animals and the ancient Egyptian; he was dressed in his shroud, and very grim and horrible he looked, but he was surrounded by an admiring crowd, to whom Professor von Schenk was relating the true story of "Jacob's Curse; or, The Mummy of Gottingen."

I. ETITIA McCLINTOCK,

MAY.

SEE, she comes, the beauteous maiden,
 With the sunlight on her hair;
 Crowned with leaves, with blossoms laden,
 Gifts bestowing everywhere !
 Through the woods her light feet dancing,
 Waking with their fairy tread
 Tiny streamlets, dimpling, glancing,
 Neath her blushes, rosy red.

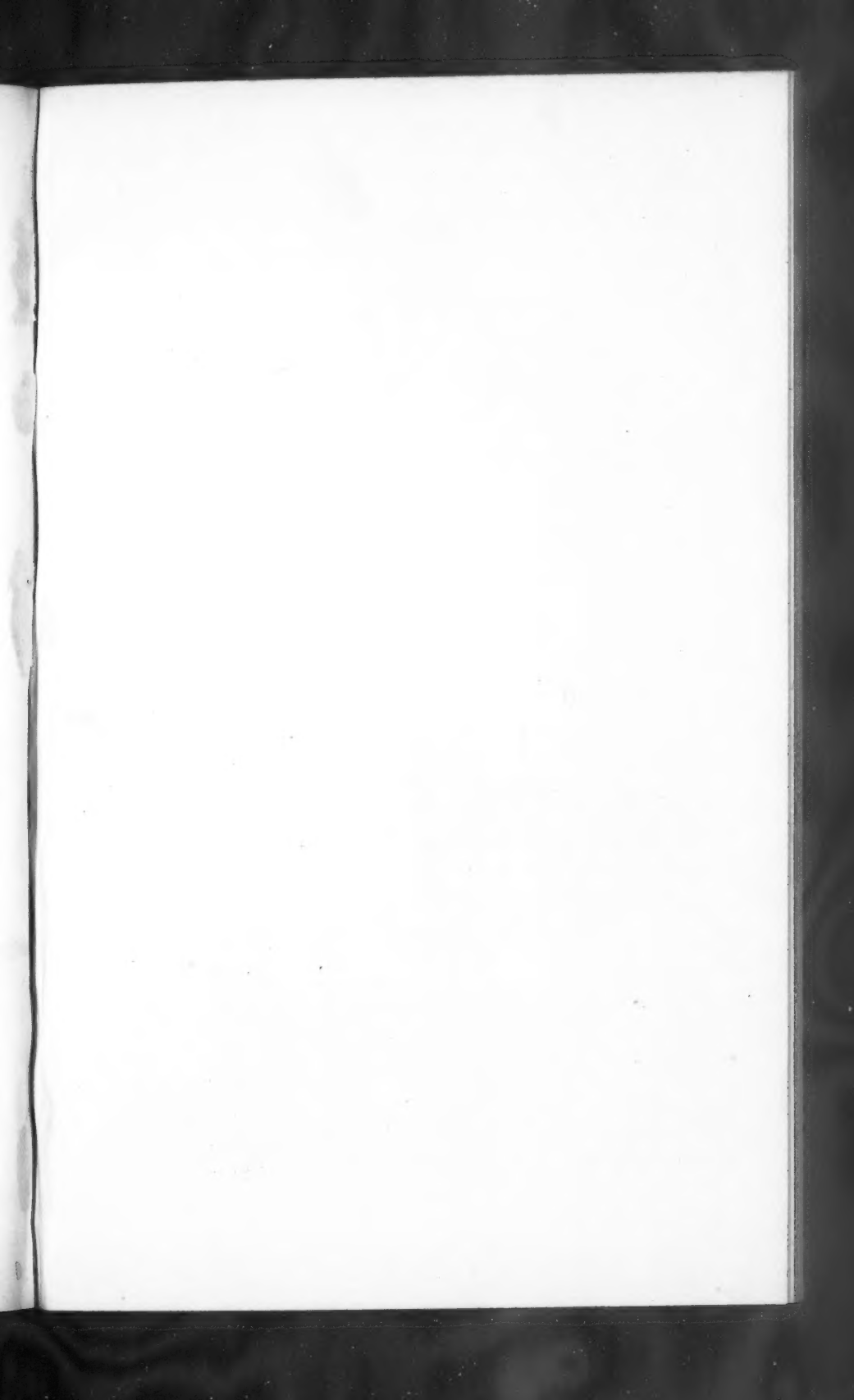
Through her locks fresh winds are blowing,
 Flash her eyes like meteors bright
 And her emerald mantle flowing,
 Spangled o'er with daisies white,
 From each mystic fold is flinging
 Sparkling gems of crystal dew,
 While the merry lark is singing,
 Oh, so gladly, in the blue !

Lo, she meets the children roving,
 Through green lanes with cheeks aglow !
 And in whispers soft and loving,
 Tells them where her sweet buds blow.
 Ah, how swiftly fly the shadows
 When her radiant face appears;
 Fairer, brighter, seem the meadows
 Laughing through her happy tears !

Gliding through the busy city,
 Ever gracious, sweet, and fair,
 Lo, she breathes with tenderest pity,
 On the weary toilers there.
 Through dark courts and dingy alleys
 Smiles she brightly on the gloom—
 Whispering of fair country valleys,
 Where the lovely cowslips bloom.

Rich and poor haste forth to meet her,
 Hers is such a magic voice,
 That the grateful hearts that greet her
 Thrill with rapture, and rejoice.
 Happy childhood crowned with daisies,
 Tottering age with locks of grey,
 With one impulse sing the praises
 Of earth's goddess, beauteous May !

FANNY FORRESTER.





M. ELLEN STAPLES.

"HE'S SIR ORACLE HERE NOW," SAID NANCY.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.